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May, 1967

Vol. 16, No. 5

BOB OLSEN'S GREAT NOVEL

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HUMAN SOUL**.....

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THE ANT WITH THE HUMAN SOUL

BOB OLSEN

Illustrated by MOREY

Although most of you newer readers probably don't know the name Bob Olsen very well—if at all—back when science fiction was young (circa 1929) every first-generation reader of Hugo Grensback's Amazing Stories most certainly did. For whenever a new Olsen story appeared—especially one in the "Four-Dimensional" series—his many fans knew they'd be getting a unique blend of sound science and refreshingly light-hearted narrative. A mixture as rare then as it is now, but still delightfully strong in the following short novel, which has one of the oddest protagonists in all of science fiction—an ant who once tried to drown himself in San Diego Bay!

First Of Two Parts



Chapter 1 An Undesired Rescue

WHEN I recovered consciousness I was still on earth, but in a room totally unfamiliar to me. This was a bewildering surprise, for I had just committed suicide—at least I thought I had—and I expected either complete annihilation or a transference to a much more torrid climate.

A strange man was bending over me. In his hand was a peculiar rubber cap, which I afterward learned was part of a pulmotor. As my eyes flickered open, the man spoke to me in a gentle, kindly voice.

"How do you feel?"

"Rotten!" I told him. That was the best way I could express it. I felt rotten—rotten in body—rotten in mind—rotten in soul. My only desire was to die—to shuffle off the mortal coil which had become unbearable to me; and here I was, through the efforts of some well-meaning but misguided meddler, still alive.

"I am Doctor De Villa," the man informed me. "Don't try to talk. I'll tell you what happened. I saw you jump off the pier and I went in after you. For many weeks I have been awaiting an opportunity like this. Last night my patience was rewarded. I rescued you singlehanded. It was a tough job. You grabbed me around the neck and nearly suc-

ceeded in drowning both of us. Thanks to a cork jacket I was wearing, I managed to get you ashore without assistance. This building is only two blocks from the pier. I carried you here myself. No one else knows about it."

Despite his warning not to talk, I couldn't help protesting, "But I wanted to die. Why didn't you leave me alone? What right have you to interfere?"

"We'll come to that later. I know you did it on purpose, of course. That was the principal reason why I risked my own life to save you without calling for assistance. I have some very definite plans for your future, young man. You'll learn more about them tomorrow. In the meantime you'd better get some rest. You've been through a serious crisis, and a good night's sleep will do you more good than anything else. Here, take these two pills. They won't hurt you. Just a harmless sedative."

The doctor stood over me while I placed the pills under my tongue and gulped them down with a swallow of water. Then he sat beside my bed and watched me intently as I pretended to fall asleep. I found that I had set myself a mighty difficult task. Desperately I fought against the powerful drug—striving with all the will power I could muster to keep my mind alert, while at the same time I closed my eyes, relaxed my muscles and breathed

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heavily to make my captor think I was sleeping.

Just as I was about ready to give up the battle, I heard the doctor rise and tip-toe toward the door. The latch clicked. A few seconds later I distinguished a faint whirring sound like the noise made by an iceless refrigerator.

I slipped out of bed. Groping my way cautiously, for the room was dark. I crept toward the door. It did not surprise me to find the door locked, but when I discovered that the knob was a dummy and could not even be turned, I was utterly bewildered. A few moments later, after I had located the switch and turned on the light, I was still more astonished to learn that there was not even a keyhole in the door. Apparently it could be unfastened only from the outside.

Seeking for some other means of escape, I examined the room thoroughly. More surprises. Except for the single door through which I was sure the doctor had made his exit, there was no other opening in the room large enough to allow the passage of a human body. Of windows there were none. Yet the room was well ventilated, thanks to the fresh air admitted through two small, heavily grilled ventilators near the ceiling. It became apparent to me that I was in a secret chamber which was so skilfully hidden in the bowels of an apart-

ment or office building that Sherlock Holmes himself would hardly have suspected its existence.

As I stood there in perplexity with my back to the door, I heard an ominous click behind me. I wheeled suddenly, expecting to see Doctor De Villa enter, but nothing happened. Then I tried the door again and got the biggest surprise of my life. It opened easily.

When I stepped through the opening, I found myself in a small clothes closet. Now I was getting somewhere, I thought. It was evident that communication with the outside could be gained through some secret panel in this closet. That ought not to be hard to locate, I reflected, as I fought grimly against the drug, which I could feel tugging my eyelids shut despite all my efforts to keep them open. Finally I had to give in. I managed to switch off the light and stagger to the bed before the sedative won, and I fell into a sound slumber.

On awakening, my first thought was to resume the investigation I had started the night before. I turned on the light and softly opened the door. Another surprise greeted me. Hanging in the little closet were the clothes which I had worn when I made my suicidal leap into San Diego Bay. The underwear had been laundered; the shirt was starched and ironed; the coat and trousers were neatly pressed.

Here was an unexpected stroke of luck. Though I was desperate enough to rush out into the street clad only in a suit of oversized pajamas, the prospect of making my escape dressed in a way that would attract no attention was much more pleasant. That I might fail in my attempt to get away did not enter my mind. I took it for granted that I would succeed.

I wasn't quite so confident an hour later, after I had dressed and gone over every square inch of the closet and of the bedroom, without finding the faintest suggestion of a secret panel. However, I did discover one peculiar thing. There was a crack at least a quarter of an inch wide between the floor of the closet and that of the room. This gave me another idea. I entered the closet, closing the door behind me. Working in the skimpy light which filtered under the door, I again explored the walls with my hands. There were several hooks in the closet. I tested each one of them in turn. The fifth hook—or it might have been the sixth one—slid to one side as I grasped it.

There was a whirring sound, like the one I had heard just after the doctor's departure the night before. The floor of the closet shivered and began to descend. This verified my suspicion. The closet was really an elevator. Its starting button was disguised as a clothes hook. Undoubtedly it could also be op-

erated from some place outside.

After moving a few yards, the elevator came to a standstill. With a stealthy caution I pushed the door open a tiny crack and peered through the opening.

The room beyond was brilliantly illuminated. I could see only a corner of it, but that was enough to make my eyes pop almost out of their sockets. Imprisoned in a large box with transparent walls was a preposterous animal. In the shape of its pointed snout, its round erect ears, its short legs and its long hairless tail it reminded me of a mouse. But its size was enormous. It must have been as large as a full grown kangaroo. Strangest of all it was really alive. It paced to and fro in the narrow confines of its prison, peering through the glass with its huge, beady eyes, which, despite their abnormal size, still seemed singularly meek and mouselike.

I pushed open the door a few inches further.

What I saw then was more like a horrible nightmare than a scene from real life. Doctor De Villa was bending over an operating table. On it lay a creature which made me think of the farmer who said, "There ain't no such animal."

In coloring, in shape, in physiological characteristics it was exactly like a honey bee; but its size was so stupendous that it left little room to spare when

stretched out on the table intended for a full grown man. It must have weighed at least a hundred pounds.

I noticed that the top of the gigantic insect's head had been removed. With a delicate scalpel in one hand and a pair of forceps in the other, Doctor De Villa was performing some sort of operation on the bee's encephalon.

It was then for the first time that I noticed the sinister appearance of the man who had fished me out of San Diego Bay. He was tall—so tall that his well muscled frame gave the deceptive impression of undue slenderness. His face was turned so that I saw it in profile. It seemed as clear cut as a cameo, against the sable blackness of a velvet curtain a few feet behind him. His hair was parted in the middle and was combed back in a way that gave a peculiar illusion of two horn-like formations protruding from his head. The heavy eyebrows, sloping upward at a rakish angle, the aquiline nose, the pointed chin, the lips, parted in a sardonic, mirthless smile, and the small moustache all suggested some familiar person whose picture I had often seen but couldn't quite place. The illusion was heightened by a weird, ruddy glow which was cast over his features by a light originating in a grotesque piece of apparatus nearby. The same light transformed the laboratory frock which the

scientist was wearing into a blood-red cape.

As soon as I could tear my eyes away from this fascinating spectacle, I glanced around the visible parts of the room in search of an exit through which I could make my escape.

Behind and beyond the doctor I saw a door. To reach it I would have to pass close to the laboring scientist, but I felt confident I could accomplish this—particularly since he seemed so engrossed in his work that his attention would not easily be distracted.

Fortunately for me the floor of the room was covered with heavy linoleum. With bated breath and stealthy step I tiptoed across the room. When I was directly behind my captor I was startled to hear him speak. Without interrupting his gruesome task, without even turning his head he remarked in a conventional tone of voice, "Good morning, Mr. Williams. Did you sleep well?"

My only answer was a sudden dash to the door. Much to my disappointment, I found it locked. Panic stricken, I seized a small metal laboratory chair and, using it as a battering ram, tried to break down the barrier.

In two long strides, Doctor De Villa was beside me. He wrenched the chair out of my hands, as easily as if I had been a baby. Wild with fear and anger, I struck

at him. With his left hand he seized my coat in the region just above the top button. When he tightened his grip I could sense that the fabric of the woolen garment was stretched over my back almost to the bursting point.

In vain I tried to land a blow on his jaw or to reach his shins with the toe of my heavy shoe. His reach was so long and his hold so powerful that all my frenzied efforts to punish him or to break his grip were futile. Due to the strenuousness of my struggles, I became bathed in perspiration. The blood vessels in my face seemed ready to burst. I was soon panting from the terrific exertion.

The uneven contest seemed to have little effect on Doctor De Villa, however. He was just as cool and calm and unruffled as if he had just completed dressing after a brisk shower bath.

In a clear voice in which all semblance of excitement, anger or even resentment were lacking, he said, "Don't you think, young man, that the most sensible thing for you to do is to calm down and talk this matter over with me in a reasonable way? I have no desire to harm you. If you will only listen to what I have to say to you, you will soon realize how silly you are to behave like this. By doing as I suggest, you have everything to gain and nothing to lose."

As soon as the first flurry of my

anger had subsided, I began to realize that the doctor was right. I *had* been silly. I *was* acting in a very unreasonable and senseless manner.

"All right!" I gasped. "I quit. Sorry I made such a fuss."

He released his grip on me.

Just then a frightful sound came to my ears. It was a deafening buzz. Like the deepest tones of a large pipe organ it whipped the air of the room into ominous vibrations.

Doctor De Villa made a frantic dash for the operating table, but he was too late. The colossal insect, which apparently had been under the influence of an anesthetic, had regained consciousness and had quickly severed the frail bonds which held it to the table.

Maddened by pain, it had taken flight.

It was a terrifying sight, as it winged drunkenly about the room. I could plainly see the throbbing, exposed brain of the horrible creature. In its great eyes, as large as dinner plates, I fancied I could read a host of human emotions: Agony, fear, revenge, the desire to kill—all seemed clearly reflected in those terrible eyes.

As the monster headed in my direction, Dr. De Villa uttered a warning cry: "Careful. Don't make a sound. Stay right where you are without moving a muscle, and it won't hurt you."

He might as well have asked me to remain standing on top of a red hot stove without uttering sound or moving a muscle.

An involuntary cry of fright burst from my lips.

Waving my arms in an ineffectual effort to frighten the creature, I backed away from it. Of course it was the worst thing to do, but I couldn't help it. My body seemed to act mechanically, paying no attention to the brain which tried to keep it in control.

I had supplied the monster with what it had been searching for—a victim on which to vent its murderous anger. Straight for me it hurtled, striking me full in the chest and sending me crashing to the floor.

It was just about to sink its deadly sting into my body when Doctor De Villa seized the insect in both his hands and tore it away from my prostrate form. The bee put up a terrific struggle, but De Villa held it in such a way that it could not use either its legs or its sting on him.

"Quick!" he yelled to me. "Get the can of ether and the large cone so it will completely cover the bee's head. Now pour some of the ether on it."

In a few seconds the insect had ceased its struggles.

"I may as well kill it," the doctor remarked calmly. "There's not much use to continue with my experiment now. The crea-

ture will probably die after all that excitement, so there's nothing to do but put it out of its misery."

When he had disposed of the bee, I extended my hand to him. He grasped it warmly as I said, "Thanks, Doctor. I guess you saved my life."

"Yes? You realize that, do you? For the second time in less than twenty-four hours, I have saved your life. Both times you tried to throw that life away. Don't you think that by this time I have a right to decide—at least in a measure—what is to be done with that life?"

As he spoke these words he was standing directly in front of the singular piece of apparatus from which the powerful beam of blood-red light emanated. Looking at him now at close range the illusion of weirdness was even more cogent than it had been before.

His piercing eyes, his slanting brows, his pointed chin and the sardonic smile on his lips filled me with a strange uneasiness.

Suddenly the mystic switch-board of my brain made the connection I had been seeking, and I thought I recognized him.

"Say!" I gasped. "Now I know who you are. Your name is De Villa, all right—with the two last letters omitted. You are the devil—that's who you are, and you saved my life so you could steal my soul!"

This seemed to amuse him immensely. He laughed. It was a hearty, wholesome, honest laugh—not at all the sort of a laugh I would expect to hear from his Satanic majesty. He turned a switch and the mysterious red light was extinguished.

Instantly the remarkable illusion vanished. All I could see then was an ordinary human being. He was exceptionally tall, to be sure, and his features were somewhat unusual, but everything that suggested to my excited mind the presence of the evil one had disappeared.

"So you think I'm Mephistopheles?" the Doctor chuckled. "You are afraid I've picked you out to be my Faust? That's the funniest thing I've heard in a long time." And he abandoned himself to another spasm of laughter.

When he had recovered himself enough to speak again, he went on: "Much as I would enjoy playing a role like that, I'm afraid I can't qualify. I have no supernatural powers. I cannot promise to fulfill all your desires. What you may be pleased to call your soul does not concern me in the least. However, I *am* interested in your body; and I am willing to make a bargain with you for the temporary use of it."

"What do you mean?" I gasped.

"It's a long story. Too long to listen to on an empty stomach. You haven't had your breakfast. Neither have I had mine. Though

I've been up and at work for several hours, I purposely postponed eating so that I could enjoy your company at the table."

"That's mighty thoughtful of you." These words were spoken in full sincerity, but I am afraid that the unsettled condition of my nerves made my polite phrase sound sarcastic.

Chapter 2 The Threat

I expected him to produce a key and unlock the door, but instead he stood several paces away from it and whistled a note which sounded like the call of a whippoorwill. Noiselessly, the door swung open.

"Your servant seems to be right on the job," said I.

"Servant?" he questioned.

"Why yes. Wasn't the door pushed open by someone in the adjoining room who heard your whistle?"

"The door was opened by a servant all right. But not by a human one. It's a purely mechanical device operating on the same principle as the *televox*. Except for you and me there are no other human beings in this apartment. I always work alone. It is the safest and the surest way."

He stepped aside, motioning for me to pass through the door. The room which I entered was a large one, sumptuously furnished as a living room.

"Here is our kitchen," he remarked, indicating a swinging door. "If you'll excuse me, I'll prepare our breakfast."

"You don't mean to tell me that you are the cook," I exclaimed.

"I'll let you decide that after you have sampled a meal prepared by my hands. I can assure you that I have had plenty of experience. Without intending to seem egotistic, I believe I could qualify as a cook."

"Mind if I wait here?" I asked.

"Certainly not. Make yourself comfortable. You'll find cigarettes on that table, and there are plenty of books and magazines over there. But you won't have much time for reading. I'll have breakfast ready in a jiffy. The menu is bacon and eggs. Is that satisfactory to you?"

"Quite," I assured him. "But if you don't mind I'd like my eggs scrambled."

I waited until I heard the cozy bubbling of the coffee percolator and smelled the delightful odor of frying bacon. Then I strode to the window and parted the heavy velvet curtains. I found myself looking out upon San Diego Bay, which was but a few hundred feet away. From my elevation I estimated that I was on the third floor of an apartment building.

The casement was built right into the wall. There seemed to be no way of opening the window. It was also guarded with a heavy grill of hand-wrought iron.

As I gazed out on the bay, I observed that something unusual was happening that morning. At least a dozen row-boats, motor boats and other small craft were hovering about the steamship pier. On the dock itself a crowd of curious spectators had collected.

As I watched this puzzling scene, I was startled to hear the doctor's voice almost in my very ear: "Interesting, isn't it? Of course you know what they are doing?"

"I haven't the slightest idea."

"They are hunting—or perhaps I should say fishing—for you."

"For me?"

"Yes. For you. There's a full account of your death by suicide in the "Morning Union". You can read all about it while we eat. Come on, Mr. Williams. Breakfast is served."

"That bacon sure smells good," I remarked as I sat down in the breakfast nook.

"Yes?" He eyed me quizzically. "And to think that just a few hours ago you tried to project yourself into a place where you'd never be able to enjoy fried bacon again. After all, it's a lot nicer to be sitting here eating bacon and eggs, than to be bumping around on the bottom of the Bay out there. Don't you think so, Mr. Kenneth Williams?"

"How did you find out my name?" My question was asked merely to make conversation.

This the doctor seemed to realize, for he didn't take the trouble to answer my query. Instead he went on to say, "I can't tell you how pleased I was when I read the slightly exaggerated account of your suicide in the "Union" this morning. I feel like a man who went fishing for perch and caught a ten-pound salmon."

"I suppose that is meant as a compliment, but I'm afraid I don't get you," was my response.

"Then permit me to explain. According to the newspaper account, you are an orphan. You have no close relatives who are now living. That's correct, is it not?"

"Sure! What of it?"

"Nothing in particular except that it simplifies matters immensely. There is no one to consider except you. That is an advantage, of course. But the thing that delighted me most was the account of your training—the work you have already done along scientific lines. I hardly expected anything like that when I fished you out of the Bay; but it happens to fit in admirably with my plans. In fact, had I been able to make a selection from among all the young men in Southern California, I don't believe I could have found a person better qualified than you are."

At this point I interrupted him. "Excuse me, Doctor De Villa, but what you are saying is all tickertape to me. Would you mind put-

ting me wise—giving me a faint idea of what you are driving at."

"Very well, then. I want you to help me perform an unusual experiment—an experiment which may sound preposterous to you but which I am certain will succeed. It will bring world-wide fame to me and I hope to you as well. If you will give me this assistance willingly, I on my part will agree to reward you very generously."

"But suppose I am not willing?" I challenged.

"In that case, I should have to compel you to help me—even against your will. I'd much prefer a voluntary submission on your part, because, then, our experiment would be bound to be more successful and more resultful. But in case you are foolish enough to refuse, I am prepared to persuade you by means of force."

"So that's what you are," I exclaimed hotly. "A body-snatcher! You think it is perfectly all right to kidnap me and to force me to do something I don't want to do."

"You seem to forget that I have some claim on your body and your life. What you threw away I recovered. For that reason I sincerely feel that your life belongs to me to do with as I see fit." He said this in a grim tone, looking me straight in the eye, with an intensity that made me shudder.

I shook my eyes free from his hypnotic stare and tried to pretend I wasn't frightened. "Don't kid yourself," I snarled. "You can't get away with stuff like that right here in the very heart of San Diego. I'll find some way to get word to the police. They'll search for me and find me here. Then it will be the big house for Doctor De Villa."

"I wouldn't count too much on that if I were you. If you knew me better, you would understand that I am not in the habit of bungling a matter like this. Naturally I have taken extraordinary precautions to prevent you from communicating with the outside and to avoid any possibility of your being found here. The police are already searching for you; but there is only one place they will think of looking, and that is in the waters of San Diego Bay. The note you left in your room and the hat which was found on the pier made your suicide so obvious that no one would think of any other possibility."

My only answer was a surly grunt. It was plain to me now that I was in the power of this man. There was nothing to be accomplished by antagonizing him.

Doctor De Villa continued, in a tone that was surprisingly gentle and friendly. "I'm afraid I've spoiled your enjoyment of your breakfast by getting you into this verbal battle. Please forgive me.

I didn't intend to make you uncomfortable. On the contrary, I'd like very much to help you if you will let me. Why can't we be friends?"

"Friends?" I scoffed. "That's a funny word to use with a man whom you have threatened as you have me."

"I didn't mean to threaten you. My only desire is to make your position clear to you. And now the thing I'd like to do most is to find some way of helping you. I wish you would confide in me. Before you reached the point of trying to take your own life, you must have gone through a period of intense suffering. Your life had become so tangled that you couldn't see any other way out except suicide. But perhaps I, with my wide experience and knowledge, can straighten things out for you."

"To straighten out my life you'd have to be a combination of Houdini and Freud," I said bitterly.

"Suppose you tell me about it," he coaxed. "According to the accounts in the newspapers no one seems to understand why you decided to commit suicide. Your note gave no explanation. What was the trouble? If it was money, I can—"

"No," I cut in. "It wasn't money."

"Then perhaps it was a woman."

"Not that either," I denied. "Oh, I guess a girl had some-

thing to do with making me realize what a mess my life was; but she wasn't the fundamental cause of it."

"Then what was it?"

"Religion!"

"Religion?" The pitch of his exclamation showed that even De Villa, who seemed so cocksure of his knowledge of human psychology, was astonished at this declaration.

"Yes, religion," I rejoined. "Or rather, the loss of my religion. That's what made me desperate. That's what forced me to try to end my life."

"Please tell me about it," he said quietly.

"There's really not much to it. Before I went to college I was extremely religious. So strong was my belief that I would have sworn on a mountain of Bibles that nothing could ever shake my faith. When I entered the university, I became interested in science and philosophy. I was shocked to learn that most of my professors were not Christians. A lot of the things they taught me wouldn't jibe with my theological dogmas. This bothered me. When I took my perplexities to the minister of my church, his only answer was, 'You must have faith to believe what you read in the Bible even if it does seem contrary to the so-called facts of science.' You see, my religion teachers know nothing of science and my science teachers can't see

anything in religion. The scientists, say, 'What we tell you can be proved to be true.' And the religious men tell me that their teachings do not require any proof. I must accept them on faith."

I paused a moment. De Villa urged me to continue.

"Ever since I can remember, my belief in Christianity and in the Bible has been my chief source of guidance. When that was shattered, I was like a ship without a rudder. I was tossed around in a sea of uncertainty. I was at the mercy of every passing gale of opinion. I had lost the one thing that made life worth living."

"You said there was a girl," he reminded me.

"Yes, there *was* a girl is right. Her name is Alice Hill. But she didn't have much to do with it, except that when I lost my religion, I also lost her. I was foolish enough to discuss the matter with her and to tell her I had lost faith in the things that seemed so clear to her. We had arguments—foolish, futile arguments—utterly senseless because there was no common ground on which we could meet mentally. She was shocked at the change in me. I don't blame her for becoming disgusted with me and refusing to see me any more."

"And because of that you decided to end it all?"

De Villa's manner as he said this reminded me of the way my

mother talked to me one day when I ran away from home, forever—and stayed out until ninety-three in the evening.

"Young man," he added sternly. "The trouble with you is that you have been sick. It's fortunate for you that I found you, because I know how to cure you. Some day you are going to thank me from the bottom of your heart."

"Then you really think you can straighten me out," I cried eagerly.

"I'm sure of it. Strange as it may seem, the very thing I have planned for you, ought to help substantially in speeding up your recovery."

"But just what have you planned for me? Here we have been talking for nearly an hour, and still I haven't the faintest idea of what you are driving at. I think you will realize that under the present circumstances your delay in coming to the point is somewhat exasperating."

"I'm sorry. Nevertheless, I'll have to run the risk of exasperating you a bit more by asking you if you'd like another cup of coffee."

"No thanks. Though the coffee is very good I have had plenty. I enjoyed the breakfast very much. I thank you. And now will you *please* come to the point.

"With pleasure. But let's go back to the laboratory. There are some things there I want to show

you. I'll need them to make my explanation clear to you."

Chapter 3

A Startling Proposal

When I was seated on one of the metal chairs in the laboratory, Doctor De Villa picked up the thread of our conversation.

"In order not to continue keeping you in suspense, I shall outline my plans very briefly. After that I shall supply whatever details seem pertinent and answer any questions you wish to ask me.

"In the first place let me explain that I have invented a device with which I can either increase or decrease the size of any object without changing any of its other properties. When I say *any* object, I mean to include not only inanimate objects, but also all living things, such as plants and animals. It will work even with insects and germs. To save time I'll postpone an explanation of the principle of my machine until later. Suppose for the time being you accept the possibility that I can cause a small insect, such as an ant, to increase in size until it is as large as a man. I can then make any changes in it that I desire and can subsequently restore it to its original size. Is that clear?"

"Sure! But what's that got to do with—"

"Pardon me for interrupting. If you'll be good enough to listen

for just one moment more, you'll find out what this has to do with you.

"I think you can realize how important my discovery is in the study of insect psychology. Hitherto our knowledge of mental processes of bugs has been seriously hampered by the small size of their brains. Practically all we know about insects has been derived from observation of their behavior. It hasn't been possible to do very much experimentation to determine the relation between certain parts of the brain and the various senses and instincts, such as have been performed on larger animals, including human beings.

"By magnifying the size of insects, I have succeeded in performing a number of very interesting and illuminating experiments. The bee which attacked you in this room a short time ago was one of my many subjects. In that particular case I was transplanting the brain of a dog into the encephalon of the bee.

"Through a series of similar experiments I have definitely established the fact that ants possess strong memories. I have also located the portion of the ant's brain in which the faculty of memory is located. All this has paved the way for the greatest experiment of all—an experiment which will bring me undying

fame. And that's where you come in.

"My plan is simply this: I shall place you under an anesthetic and shall perform an operation on your head, removing that portion of your brain which is the seat of your memory. This I shall transplant into the brain of an ant, which I have previously expanded to a volume corresponding to yours. Then I shall restore the ant to its natural size and shall permit it to return to its nest and resume its regular activities. My belief is that you will be thoroughly cognizant of everything that happens to that ant. You will not only be able to observe everything that goes on around the ant but you will also obtain a clear idea of what occurs inside the ant's brain. Later on, I shall capture the ant and shall increase its size once more. After restoring the borrowed brain segment to you, I shall bring you back to consciousness. You will then be able to describe the mental reactions of an ant both objectively and subjectively. What do you think of the idea?"

"Horrible!" I exclaimed. "Un-speakably horrible."

"I'm sorry you feel that way about it."

"Why shouldn't I? What's the good of it? Suppose I do go through with this. Suppose your extremely optimistic ideas about it are justified, and the experiment is successful. What prac-

tical benefit will you or anyone else derive from it?"

"If by practical benefit you mean something from which money can be made, I'll have to answer that this experiment will have no value that is practical in that sense. But in another sense, the work will be of immense value. It ought to accomplish something than which there is nothing more important in human history."

"And what is that?"

"Adding to the store of human knowledge. Surely, with the training you have had in science, it is not necessary for me to convince you that anything that will increase knowledge is extremely worthwhile. To accomplish less than this, thousands of really big men have sacrificed their lives.

"But suppose for the present we ignore the effect of this experiment on human progress. Let's regard it from your own selfish standpoint. Let's consider what it will do for *you*.

"According to your own admission, your life has been a failure. You were ready to throw it away. Do you know the real reason for this? You hinted at it when you said you were like a ship without a rudder. You not only lack a steering mechanism but you also lack a destination. You have no purpose—that's why you were ready to give up so quickly. Here's your chance to

acquire a purpose—a real purpose—the most important and significant purpose you could possibly have. That's all you need to make you well and to untangle your life—a purpose and the will to accomplish it."

"Perhaps there is some truth in that," I admitted. "But I did have a purpose. You thwarted it."

"You mean your purpose to destroy yourself, I presume. All right then. Suppose we consider the matter solely from that angle. You want to have done with living. But what's the use of throwing away, just because you don't want it yourself, something that is valuable to someone else? Wouldn't it be more sensible and more sporting to give it away or even to sell it?"

"I don't believe I get you," was my response to this suggestion.

He replied by asking me a question: "Do you still want to die?"

"I sure do. Nothing has happened to make me change my mind."

"And suppose I permitted you to leave this apartment. Suppose I turned you loose. Would you attempt suicide again?"

"Certainly. Why not?"

"All I can say is that I am gravely disappointed. I had hoped that you would be influenced by what I have said to you. However, even if you persist in this unreasonable and insane obses-

sion of yours, you will still be better off if you give or sell your life to me."

"What advantage could I possibly gain by selling my life? I can't take the purchase money with me, can I?"

"No, but you can present it to some dear friend of yours—Alice Hill, for instance; or you can donate it to some worthy charity."

"What good will that do me?"

My companion shook his head.

"You certainly are a sick man. I feel sorry for you. 'What good will that do me?' you ask. What a selfish, asinine question! Have you completely lost all sense of decency and of your obligations to your fellow men? If you insist on dying, isn't it better to die in a way that will benefit somebody? A little while ago I said I was fortunate in having found you. Now I'm beginning to wonder if I wasn't grievously mistaken. You're the most unreasonable person I've ever been associated with."

I enjoyed his discomfiture. With an insolent grin I taunted him: "You seem to have changed your tune, doctor. A while ago you informed me that you would carry on the experiment whether I consented or not. If that's the case, why take so much trouble trying to gain my consent?"

"Because I want to help you. I am sure that this experience will straighten your mind out. Another reason is that the experi-

ment will accomplish a great deal more, if I have your willing cooperation, than if I forced you into it."

"You intimated a moment ago that you would like to buy my life. Am I to infer that you are willing to pay a considerable sum for my cooperation?"

"Precisely. Your cooperation is worth ten thousand dollars to me. If you wish, I shall place that sum to your credit so that you can use it yourself after the experiment. For instance, it may make a nice little nest egg for you and Alice, after you have straightened yourself out. If you wish, you may send the money to anyone you desire before you submit to the experiment; or you can leave instructions with me as to how to dispose of the money in case anything happens to you. You may depend on it that your wishes will be carried out."

"You think, then, that the mission you have chosen for me will be dangerous."

"Naturally there will be some risks. But I shall take extra precautions to reduce these hazards to the minimum. On the other hand I can promise you that your life among the ants will be anything but tiresome. It will be crammed full of exciting and fascinating experiences. There will be enough adventure and interesting events to keep you from thinking about suicide. And, after the experiments are finished,

if you still are in the same frame of mind, there will be nothing to prevent you from carrying out your intentions. In fact, I shall then be glad to help you make a good job of it."

"But how about yourself?" I asked. "If we do go through with this, isn't it likely to prove rather risky for you?"

"I can't see that there would be any risks worth considering. Even if there were, I'd gladly assume them for the sake of science."

"Do you mean to say that you'd be willing to hang for the sake of science?"

"I might. But what's the use of introducing such an impossible conjecture?"

"What makes you think it impossible? Let's suppose that the experiment is a failure. Suppose I should die on your hands. You'd still be encumbered with what lawyers call my *corpus delicti*, wouldn't you?"

"That doesn't worry me in the least. There are a thousand ways in which I could get rid of your body. Perhaps the simplest way would be to put you back where I found you—in the waters of the Bay. It would be an easy matter to make your head look as if it had been battered against the piles of the pier. When the searchers out there found your body, it would merely form a logical conclusion to the chapter which you began when you wrote your fare-

well note and left your hat on the dock."

"I see you have it all figured out."

"Oh, yes. Yes, indeed. I always plan my work very carefully in advance, making suitable provisions for every possible contingency. That's why I never make any mistakes or commit any blunders."

"Then I certainly hope your record for one hundred percent efficiency is not broken while you are working on me."

"Does that mean you are ready to give your consent?" he cried eagerly.

I evaded a direct answer to his question.

"You said something about adventure a moment ago. As I remember it, you promised that my life among the ants will be crammed full of exciting and fascinating experiences. Frankly, I don't see how the life of an ant could be at all interesting. I've watched the little beggars at their work. They seem to be continually rushing back and forth like a bunch of Sunday motorists who are in a terrific hurry to get nowhere and do nothing."

"If that's the impression you obtained from watching ants, I'm afraid your observations have been very superficial. Scientists who have devoted years to the study of ants have certainly not found them dull or uninteresting. It may surprise you to learn that

most authorities believe that the activities of ants come closer to those of human beings than those of any other creatures do."

"How about the anthropoid apes? I thought it was generally conceded that they are more like men than any other animals."

"Looking at the matter from a purely morphological standpoint, that, of course, is true. But from the standpoint of behavior—of social activities, mental development, constructive intelligence and similar 'human' traits, the ant is far ahead of the ape in development.

"Let me give you an example: In certain tropical countries there are vast armies of so-called 'driver ants.' They travel across the country in serried ranks, like well disciplined soldiers. They have their leaders, their scouts and their intelligence corps. They search out caterpillars, spiders and other bugs, attacking them, killing them and tearing them to pieces. Small animals like mice and snakes fall an easy prey to these vandals. Even animals as large as sheep or cows, when tethered so that they cannot escape, have been destroyed by driver ants, who strip every particle of flesh and gristle from their bones. No doubt you have heard of men being tortured and killed by leaving them bound on top of an ant hill.

"Strange as it may seem, however, there are places where these

foraging ants are regarded as friends of men. The make periodic invasions into human habitations, devouring or driving out all the vermin such as cockroaches, spiders and rats which infest the roofs and walls of tropical homes. The natives call them 'ants of visitation' and welcome the semi-annual housecleaning which they give to their homes. The ants stay only long enough to do a thorough job of de-verminizing a house—then they move on to the next building."

He paused.

"That's all very interesting," I remarked. "Of course I've heard about driver ants, but I had no idea that they were so intelligent as your account seems to indicate. Was your idea to enlist me in an army of ants like that? If it is, I don't believe I'd care for the job.

"I wouldn't mind the sheep and the cows, but I'm afraid the spiders and snakes wouldn't agree with me at all. And as for caterpillars! I remember once when I was a bit of a lad, I tried to eat a caterpillar. It was so hairy and so wiggly that I didn't enjoy it at all—in fact, I had to spit it out before I had consumed half of it."

The Doctor looked at me out of the corner of his eye as if he didn't know whether to laugh or take me seriously. He compromised by ignoring my attempts at being facetious.

"I had no intention of putting you into a colony of driver ants," he said solemnly. "I merely mentioned them because they furnish familiar examples of the social activities of ants. There are other species of the insects which are far more manlike than the army ants. For years I have kept several ant colonies of different species under close observation. I intend to use them in our experiments."

"How many different kinds of ants are there?" I inquired. "About a dozen?"

"A great many dozen. In fact, six thousand different species of ants have been described so far by scientists. Even this large list is by no means complete. I wouldn't be surprised if, after the job of classifying ants has been performed thoroughly, it will transpire that there are at least ten thousand different species."

Doctor De Villa has been speaking in an academic tone—like a professor lecturing to a class of students. Now he became more personal:

"You seem to be getting interested in our little insect friends, Mr. Williams. Does that indicate a decision favorable to my plans?"

"Not necessarily," I hastened to hedge. "I'll have to admit, though, that your promise of adventure interests me. That's one thing which has been missing from my drab life. I've always yearned for excitement and per-

ilous adventure and I've never had a chance to gratify my yen. Perhaps that is what's wrong with me. My existence has been so commonplace that I'm sick and tired of the monotony."

De Villa, with the instinct of a master salesman, seized eagerly at the opportunity which my admission opened up.

"You are absolutely right! What you need more than anything else in the world is adventure! And can you think of any human experience that could be anywhere nearly as exciting and interesting as to live for a while in a colony of ants, participating in their battles, their labors and their sports?"

"Sports?" I gasped. "Do you mean to tell me that ants engage in sports?"

"They certainly do. Ants have their athletic contests and their organized games, just as we do. But I'd rather not give you any of the details. It will be much better, both from the standpoint of your enjoyment and the results of our experiments, if you experience these things without being confused by any preconceived notions. However, I want to reiterate what I said before. You may be absolutely sure that your life among the ants will be crammed full of adventure and interesting experiences. Won't you just accept my word for this and tell me right now that you are willing to cooperate with me?"

"Do I have to decide right now?" I procrastinated.

"Not at all. Take as much time as you wish. Naturally, after having progressed this far, I'm eager to go ahead. But perhaps it will be just as well if you defer your decision until you know more about the scientific discoveries which will make it possible for me to transfer your consciousness and memory-faculties into the body of an ant. Would you care to hear about them now?"

"Sure! Fire away!"

Chapter 4 The Mysterious Force

Doctor De Villa led me to a fantastic mechanism near one corner of the room. The most prominent feature of the device was a chamber shaped like a large bathtub turned upside down. It was built of steel and was provided with four large glass windows, one at the curved end, one at the top and one at each side. I estimated that it was about eight feet long, three feet wide and four feet high. The flat end was open but was equipped with a semi-circular door of steel which was hinged at the bottom and could be closed hermetically by means of six strong bolts with wing nuts. Surrounding this peculiar contrivance was a bewildering array of coils, tubes, levers and dials.

"This is what I call my Volu-

malter," the doctor announced. "I'm sorry I can't explain all the details of the mechanism to you. For one thing, it's pretty complicated—even for a man of your scientific training to understand. Another reason is that I haven't had it patented yet, and I can't take chances of having the idea stolen." As he said this there was a twinkle in his eyes which told me he was kidding.

"I can tell you this much though," he continued. "My machine makes use of a brand new kind of energy which is utterly different from any other kind which has hitherto been discovered. Perhaps I can make it a trifle clearer by using two analogies. You know that inanimate objects may be made to expand by the application of heat. Of course the amount of expansion which can be produced in this way is relatively small. I mention it merely as an illustration of expansion produced by the application of force—in this case the force of heat. The usual explanation of this phenomenon is that the increase in temperature causes increased molecular activity, which also brings about the increase in size.

"Another example of expansion is illustrated by the sponge. When dry its volume shrinks enormously but when the pores are filled with water or some similar liquid, the volume of the sponge is increased considerably.

"Please don't get the idea that the system I use is directly analogous to the methods illustrated by the heated iron or the soaked sponge. At the same time there is a faint similarity between my process and the last named method.

"You probably know that all objects—including insects, men and other animals, are porous. They are made up of particles of matter which do not touch each other but are separated from each other by space. In searching for a way to make things larger without destroying their characteristics, my task was simply to find some way to make the particles of matter move further away from each other, thus increasing the volume of the spaces between the molecules.

"After years of patient research I discovered a marvelous substance. It isn't a solid, a liquid or a gas. In most of its properties it is like a very tenuous gas but it resembles a liquid in that it is held together by a very powerful cohesive force, and it resists efforts to compress it. I call this substance SPACITE. The Volumalter includes a mechanism for generating Spacite and for forcing it into the pores of objects. It also contains a device for drawing the Spacite out of an object which has become impregnated with it. But I suppose the best way to make the system clear

to you is to give you a practical demonstration."

He stepped to a cabinet and took down a glass beaker which was half full of earth.

"Since we are interested primarily in ants, I'll start with one of these industrious creatures. I took some of them away from their home yesterday. They belong to the genus *atta*, commonly known as the leaf-cutting ants."

While he was talking, he poked around in the beaker with a pair of tweezers. He finally captured one of the insects and placed it inside the vaulted chamber of the Volumalter. Then he closed the door, clamping it firmly in place with the wing nuts.

"Can you see it in there?" he asked, indicating one of the side windows.

I peered through the glass and was just barely able to distinguish the tiny creature which looked utterly incongruous as it scampered about what to it was an enormously large room.

"Aren't you going to tie it up so it will stay put," I asked.

"No," he replied "That isn't necessary. The stuff works exactly the same whether it moves around or remains perfectly still. See if you can keep your eye on the ant. Watch what happens to it when I turn on the power."

He threw in a switch, opened a valve and adjusted one of the dials. From the interior of the

machine came a low, droning hum.

I expected to see the ant stop suddenly, but it didn't give the slightest indication that anything unusual was happening to it. For an instant I took my eyes away from the ant and looked at the doctor, but he was too much occupied with the controls of the machine to pay any attention to me. When I glanced back, I was surprised to see that the ant had already expanded until it was fully five inches long. In open-mouthed astonishment I watched the creature as it grew larger and larger. It was almost as if the living insect was a hollow rubber balloon which was being inflated right in front of my eyes.

Soon it had become so large that it could no longer scamper around. Instead it paced back and forth, like a lion in a narrow cage. Still it continued to grow until it was so large that it had only room enough to move a few inches in each direction. Then the inventor of the device operated the controls again, and the expansion process ceased.

For the first time since he had started the machine, De Villa spoke:

"There you are. You get the idea now, don't you? The brain of that ant is now approximately the same size as yours. It will be a simple matter to make a transfer of memory faculties. What do you think of it?"

Strange to say, I was more interested in the appearance of the insect than in the miracle I had just witnessed.

"Ugly beast, isn't it?" I said with a shudder.

"Do you think so? To me it is beautiful. Notice the symmetry of its body, the perfect co-ordination of the six legs, the splendor of its coloring and the efficiency of its mandibles."

"It's well armed, all right. Gosh, but I'd hate to get nipped by that baby. But it must feel funny, all blown up like that."

"On the contrary, I doubt if it has noticed any difference in itself. The only change it has observed has been in its surroundings. It thinks that the chamber in which it is confined has diminished in size—that's all."

"Will it keep on living if you take it out of there?"

"Certainly. Let me show you."

"Never mind. I'll take your word for it. If you let that monster out, it might take a notion to chew my head off."

"You don't need to be afraid of anything like that. I'll just anesthetize it for a minute and transfer it to one of my glass cages. Do you see this valve over here? It controls the ventilation inside the chamber. Right now I am supplying the ant with just the right amount of pure air. When I turn this the air current is replaced by a supply of nitrous oxide, which as you know is the

'laughing gas' which dentists use. Now watch what happens."

I watched. The insect, which had been moving forward and backward in the narrow confines of its prison, suddenly stopped and cocked its head to one side as if to listen. Then one of its legs seemed to give way and it began to stagger. A moment later it was lying motionless on its side.

The doctor turned the valve again, waited for a few seconds and then opened the door at the end of the device.

"Give me a hand, will you?" he said to me. "I can lift it alone, of course, but it's a little bit easier for two to carry it."

I was surprised to notice how heavy the creature was, and I made a mental note to ask De Villa about it as soon as we had put the ant in a place of safety. We carried the inert body to a cage right next to the one in which the giant mouse was imprisoned. The inventor stepped on a small lever and the front of the cage swung open. We deposited the insect in the receptacle and closed the door. Glancing at an indicator connected with the cage, Dr. De Villa adjusted a valve and remarked, "I'll give it an extra shot of oxygen to bring it back quickly."

As he spoke, I saw one of the insect's legs twitch. A few minutes later it was running around

in the cage as if nothing had happened.

"It doesn't look like it felt any pain or discomfort, does it?" De Villa remarked.

"No," I admitted. "But how do you account for the enormous increase in weight? From your description of the principle and from the way the creature looked when it was being blown up, I expected that it would be very light. With the same amount of matter in its body spread over such a tremendously greater volume, I should think its density would be extremely small.

"You seem to forget that I have added something to the ant's body. Although Spacite is very tenuous, it has an appreciable density; in fact, it tends to assume the same density as the matter which surrounds it. Are you convinced now that my theories are practical?"

"I suppose so. But I'm afraid there is one flaw in your scheme which will knock the whole plan into a cocked hat."

This assertion of mine—the assertion of a callow youth to a man of marvelous scientific achievement, must have sounded ridiculously egotistical. But De Villa was very tolerant of my self-assurance. He merely grinned good-naturedly and asked, "Just what is this flaw you think you have discovered?"

"You seem to have forgotten that my brain will be in a to-

tally different condition from the brain of the ant after it is blown up. I can easily understand how you can reduce that monstrous insect back to its normal size by sucking out the Spacite that you used to inflate it with. But how about that piece of human brain inside the ant's skull? Wouldn't that remain exactly the same size? And if it did, wouldn't the brain tissues be destroyed when they were crushed inside the contracting walls of the ant's head?"

Much to my surprise, the doctor gave me a friendly slap on the back. "Let me compliment you, young fellow. Your question shows that you have been using that brain of yours. However, it happens that my scheme as you call it, makes provision for the seeming flaw. The best way to convince you of this is to show you another demonstration. If you'll pardon me a moment, I'll see if I can find a subject."

He disappeared into the living room and a few minutes later came back with a cat in his arms. "Let me make you acquainted with Omar, my Persian kitten," he joked. "Omar and I are great friends. These experiments of mine are an old story to him. Here, Snookums, hop in there," and he bundled the cat into the chamber of the Volumalter.

While he was closing the door and adjusting the controls, De

Villa said, "You will notice that the name of my machine, 'Volumalter,' indicates that it alters volume. It makes things either larger or smaller, and it works both ways equally well.

"First I shall fill the pores of the cat's body full of Spacite. To make sure that I have done this, I shall keep the power on until I notice a slight increase in the animal's size. This indicates that the Spacite has completely filled all the space between the particles of matter in the cat's body, completely displacing whatever other medium was there before. All I have to do is to withdraw some of the Spacite. I do this by means of this lever. Now the chamber is connected with a mechanism which sucks the Spacite out of the cat's body, thus causing the molecules of matter to draw closer together. Notice what happens."

This time, instead of expanding the creature inside the Volumalter began to grow smaller. At the end of about ten minutes it was less than an inch long. De Villa turned off the power and opened the door. Picking up the tiny creature, he placed it in the palm of my hand. It sat there nonchalantly for a while, licking its tiny paw and washing its face; then it curled its forelegs under its body and lay down in a most cat-like manner. I stroked it gently with the tip of my little finger. By holding it close to my

ear I could barely distinguish a faint, but contented purr.

"Gee! But that's cute!" I exclaimed. "I bet you could make a lot of money selling cats like this. They would be right in style, you know."

"Right in style?" De Villa questioned. "I don't believe I comprehend your meaning."

"Can't you see? It fits in with the modern vogue for small things—pee-wee golf courses, miniature gardens, midget automobiles and all that sort of thing. Imagine what a hit a flock of microscopic cats and dogs would make!"

"There may be possibilities in your idea," the doctor laughed; "but I'm afraid I can't take the time to go into the midget animal business. I have too many other matters of extreme importance to occupy my attention. First of all I should like to know if you are satisfied concerning the feasibility of my plan."

"I have to believe my own eyes, don't I?" was my response.

"That isn't always a safe rule to follow, but in this case you may be certain that your eyes have not deceived you. That being the case, the next thing I would like to know is whether you intend to co-operate with me willingly."

"Sure thing!" I said. "Since it looks as if I'll have to go through with it anyway, I may

as well be a sport and do it willingly."

"Great!" he cried, grasping my hand and pressing it warmly. "I can't tell you how much I appreciate this, Kenneth. It means more to me than anything else in the world. Let me thank you from the bottom of my heart."

"Oh, that's O.K.," I stammered.

Now that the die was cast, I felt a strange surge of emotion swirling inside of me. I turned my head away so that De Villa could not see the unmanly tears which were welling up in my eyes, despite all my efforts to hold them back. When I could control my voice, I said, "I guess I ought to thank you, too. Not so much because you saved my life. You've done more than that. You've given me a reason for wanting to live and to accomplish something. I hope you'll excuse me for the senseless things I've said and done. Will you?"

"Of course, I will, Kenneth, my friend. There really isn't anything to excuse. You simply acted on your own natural impulses. I knew you would come around when you really understood." He glanced at his wrist watch. "Hello! It's after one. My stomach says it's time for lunch. Come on. Let's adjourn to the kitchen, and I'll give you a good job peeling potatoes."

Chapter 5 Final Instructions

While we were eating an excellent luncheon, prepared by Doctor De Villa, with me acting as scullion, my host discussed with me the details of our proposed experiment.

"Does it make any difference to you when we start work?" he asked.

"Not a bit. Now that the thing is decided, the sooner we get going the better it will suit me."

"That's splendid! Suppose we plan to commence early tomorrow morning. Will that be satisfactory?"

"Can't we start this afternoon?"

"That might be possible but I don't think it would be advisable. There are a number of preparations to be made. It will be necessary for me to give you complete instructions and to make sure that you understand thoroughly what you are to do."

"O.K. Can't you start shooting me full of information right away?"

"I suppose I could. But suppose we eliminate the shop talk for the present—at least while we are eating."

"You're the doctor. But as far as I'm concerned, I can't think of anything more interesting to talk about than what you call shop talk."

"Very well, then, suppose you tell me what to do with the ten thousand dollars which I am going to turn over to you?"

"Listen, Doc," I said familiarly. "I don't like the idea of selling myself for a sum of money like that. If you want to do so, you can pay me a salary, but even that won't be necessary, since I can't very well spend the dough while I'm masquerading as an ant."

"But after the experiment is completed and you resume your life as a human being. I think you will then find that ten thousand dollars will come in very handy."

"Perhaps so. Let's leave it this way, then. You keep the money. If I need any of it, I'll call on you. Is that O.K.?"

"Yes, of course. But suppose—Oh, I may as well be frank with you and tell you that although I shall take every possible precaution to safeguard your life—you will be in constant danger. Suppose I do not succeed in bringing you back. Suppose you are lost or killed—what shall I do with the money then?"

"Keep it yourself."

"But isn't there someone you'd like to give it to—your girl friend, Miss Hill, for instance?"

"No. I'm afraid it wouldn't help her. It would be more likely to harm her. Her folks are well fixed. She has always been pampered and petted. Ten thousand of her own might spoil her."

"And there is no one else."

"Not a soul."

"But how about charity? Isn't

there some worthy cause toward which you would like to contribute this money—as a sort of memorial—a tribute to the memory of Kenneth Williams?"

"Nix! When I pass on, the sooner I am forgotten the better it will suit me. But if it will make you feel any better, you pick out the charity yourself and donate the money in the name of the Unknown Scientists who are constantly risking and sacrificing their lives in the interests of human knowledge."

"That's an excellent idea, Kenneth, and you deserve a great deal of credit for thinking of it."

For a while we ate in silence. Then I began to snicker.

"What's the cause of all this risibility?" my companion wanted to know.

"I just thought of something. Suppose while I am engaging in the industrial, domestic and social activities of the ant colonies, I happen to fall in love with a cute little lady ant? Isn't it possible that I would become so infatuated that I would want to get married, settle down and raise a family of little antlets all my own?"

This amused the doctor immensely. It was several minutes before he could stop laughing long enough to talk.

"I can see that you don't know much about the matrimonial affairs of ants," he chuckled. "In the first place, the ant into whose

body I intend to transfer your consciousness will not be a male, but will be a worker. Perhaps I ought to explain that in one sense there are three different sexes of ants. They are the female or queen ant, the winged male and the workers. The workers are really females but, except in very rare cases, they do not propagate. Some naturalists refer to them as being of the neuter sex.

"Many ant colonies contain only one queen. All she does is lay eggs. She never leaves the nest. Food is brought to her by the workers who make up the bulk of the inhabitants. When the eggs hatch out, some of the young ants are born with wings, while the remainder, the workers, are born without wings. On a certain day, the winged ants—male and female—emerge from the nest and launch forth on the nuptial flight. The males have very large sharp eyes. Weddings take place in mid-air.

"The male ant is a very stupid fellow. His only purpose is to reproduce the species. He is so helpless that he can't even make his way back to the nest or find food for himself. Usually he dies within a few days after the marriage."

"If that's the case, I don't think I'd care to be a male ant," I interposed.

"I didn't think you would. The

life of a worker is much more interesting."

"But what about the queens? What happens to them?"

"They immediately proceed to establish colonies of their own. Various methods are used by different species. Sometimes the fertile queen calmly appropriates the nest belonging to another queen, murders her royal rival and takes possession of the throne. In other cases she ingratiates herself with the workers and they turn against their old queen and put her to death.

"But the most common method is for the queen to start a colony with her own offspring.

"The first thing she does on alighting is to tear off her wings. The large wing muscles are gradually absorbed by her body, thus providing sustenance for her during the time it takes for her first eggs to hatch.

"She searches out a suitable place, in a cavity or under a stone, and there she starts to lay eggs. She takes care of the first arrivals herself, but as soon as enough worker ants have matured they immediately tackle the work of excavating a nest, feeding the queen and caring for the eggs subsequently laid. As a result of the one nuptial flight, a queen ant can produce a family numbering several hundred thousand."

"Whew!" I exclaimed. "There's certainly no birth control or race

suicide among the ants, is there?"

"Hardly," he replied. "That's one reason why they have advanced so rapidly."

By this time we had finished our luncheon.

"Let's go back to the laboratory," the doctor suggested. "I have some work to do, if you don't mind. But it is more or less mechanical in character. I can talk to you while I am working.

He donned a pair of overalls, rolled up his sleeves and began to putter around with the Volu-malter, cleaning, oiling and adjusting the various parts of the machine.

"Have you any questions you would like to ask before I give you your final instructions?" he inquired.

"Yes, I have. Whereabouts is the ant colony located—the one where I am supposed to belong?"

"In the garden of my estate. It's between here and the Mexican border. I have a place that is ideal for the purpose. In it there are seventeen ant hills, all of different species of ants. Three of them were established there naturally. The others I started myself, by bringing a fertile queen and a few workers from nests in various parts of the United States, Mexico and other countries. I have taken a great deal of pains to provide the environment needed by each species of ant to develop naturally and prosper-

ously, so that all my colonies are living exactly as they would in their native habitats."

"Have you picked out any particular colony to be my future home?"

"I have given the matter some thought, but haven't decided definitely yet. It is only fair that your preferences, if you have any, should be taken into consideration."

"How should I know which one to select? To me one ant hill looks just like any other one."

"It all depends on how you feel about adventure and danger. For my part, I'd much rather start you in a peaceful colony where the risk would be minimized. There are several reasons for my preference: One is that it will give you a better opportunity to orient yourself and to become accustomed to your ant body before being forced to face any serious crisis. Another reason is that I am anxious to surround the first phase of our experiment with every possible safeguard. My chief concern is to verify my belief that you will remember everything that happens while you are occupying the ant's body. After we have established this point, in case you yearn for more excitement and adventure, I can easily place you in a colony where you are sure to have plenty of strife and turmoil."

He paused a moment, as if waiting for my reaction.

"What you say sounds reasonable enough," I responded. "I meant what I said about craving adventure, all right, but there's no need of jumping into serious danger right off the reel. The peaceful colony sounds good to me. What am I supposed to do after I get into it?"

"That question reminds me of a story. Stop me if you've heard it. A middle-aged lady was taking her first ocean voyage. She went to the captain and said, 'Suppose I get seasick, what shall I do?' To which the captain replied, 'Don't worry, Madame, you'll do it.'"

"You mean that my actions will be governed by instinct or something like that?"

"Within certain limits, yes. The main thing for you to do is to act naturally. Do whatever seems to be the best thing under any given set of circumstances. About all the instructions I have to give you concern the means by which I can get you back again."

"Now that you mention it, that *is* rather important, isn't it?" I rejoined. "In a family of several hundred thousand, all looking exactly alike, it isn't going to be so easy for you to pick out little me, is it? Gosh, I'm glad you thought of that!"

"I try to think of everything. Several schemes have occurred to me. I believe the most simple

one will be for me to tie a fine white hair around your body. Then, when you want to come back, you can separate from the others and stand by yourself in a conspicuous place near the nest. I'll visit the nest at periodic intervals. With the aid of a reading glass, I'll be able to recognize you. Then I can pick you up and bring you back to the laboratory.

"In case I wish to summon you, I shall signal to you with a riveting machine. By operating this in contact with the ground a few feet away from the nest, I shall produce a miniature earthquake, which will be different from any other vibration in the earth and which you will be able to feel no matter where you are or what you are doing. When you feel the earthquake, you are to come into the open and stand still a short distance away from the nest. Do you understand?"

"Sure! That sounds simple enough. But you haven't told me yet what kinds of ants you have selected to be my sisters."

"I have a very fine colony of leaf-cutting ants. The insect we enlarged this morning is one of them. She will make a good subject for our experiment just as she is. Take a good look at her, so you'll know what you'll look like after the operation."

Following his suggestion, I stepped to the glass cage in

which the giant ant was confined and gave it a thorough examination. It didn't take long for me to understand what De Villa meant when he said the ant was beautiful. As I gazed at it then, realizing that soon my will would be directing that wonderfully formed body, it seemed to be one of the most attractive objects I had ever beheld.

De Villa called me away from my admiring scrutiny.

"If you want me to, I'll give you a brief account of the activities of the leaf-cutting ants. I'd rather not tell you very much, however, because that might interfere with the spontaneity of your observations. These ants obtained their name because of their habit of biting off pieces of leaves and carrying them into their nests. No one has ever seen an ant eat these leaf particles. It has been definitely established that the ants don't use them for food. The first thing I want you to find out is what use the ants make of these leaf fragments. Scientists, of course, have been able to find out something about this mysterious custom, but I'd rather not tell you what the purpose of the leaf-gathering is. Your observations should either verify or disprove the usually accepted explanation of this phenomenon. Is that clear?"

"Clear as buttermilk," I assured him. "All I have to do is act like an ant detective. I'll snoop

around the nest, find out what becomes of the leaf particles and come back and report to you."

"You don't necessarily need to come back right away. The likelihood is that you'll find other interesting things in the ant nest. If you feel like it, you can remain for several days, or as long as you wish."

"O.K. Whenever you are ready, I'll be there with bells on."

I spent the remainder of the afternoon helping Doctor De Villa with his laboratory work.

At six o'clock we ate another homemade meal. After dinner we adjourned to the living room. In some mysterious manner, the evening paper had made its appearance on one of the tables.

It isn't often that a person is permitted to read his own obituary notice, but that rare privilege was accorded to me. There on the front page of the *San Diego Evening Tribune* I was startled to see my own photograph staring back at me. Most astonishing of all, right next to me was a portrait of Alice Hill. Our pictures were linked together with an enormous interrogation point. Above them, printed in stud-horse type was the caption:

**"COLLEGE STUDENT
IS LOVE SUICIDE"**

There were no less than three articles in that issue of the pa-

per in which my supposed suicide was discussed. One of them was a straight news item, telling about the two notes I had written, one to Alice and the other to my landlady. The discovery of my hat on the steamship pier and its subsequent identification were also mentioned. The article closed with a description of the unsuccessful attempts which had been made to recover my body.

The second article was written by someone who had communicated with the University authorities. From it I was surprised to learn that my former professors had regarded me as a model student. I couldn't help smiling when they attributed my act to a nervous breakdown brought on by overstudy.

But the story that gave me the biggest kick was the one signed by a sob sister who had interviewed Alice. She was reported to have said that we had been sweethearts ever since we were in grade school. She told of the way I had begun to get strange ideas about religion and how because of this she had quarreled with me. According to the lady reporter, she wept copiously during the entire interview and declared that now that I was dead she was just beginning to realize how much she had really loved me.

Reading this filled me with an intense longing to see Alice again. My first impulse was to ask Doctor De Villa for permis-

sion to phone or write to her, but after deliberating the matter more leisurely, I came to realize I ought not to do that even if my host would permit it, which was doubtful. What was the use of letting her know I was alive, only to have her find out that I was embarking on an enterprise from which I might never return?

So I stifled my yearning to communicate with Alice and said nothing about it to Doctor De Villa.

After I had finished reading the paper, I had a little chat with my host. "What is your opinion about religion, Doctor?" I asked him.

"I'm glad you brought this subject up, Kenneth," he replied. "I've been wanting to talk to you about it. If you don't mind my saying so, your case illustrates the familiar aphorism that a little knowledge is a dangerous thing. You learned just enough to destroy what you call your faith in religion. The fact that your previous belief was so easily undermined shows that it wasn't very well established in the first place. I think you will find this to be true. If you will keep on studying science and philosophy, you should begin to regain your faith in the teachings of Christ. You will cease to quibble about inconsequential details and will devote your attention exclusively to the fundamental principles. When

you do that, you will find it quite easy to reconcile your religion with your science and *vice versa*."

"Maybe you are right," I told him. "Anyway, I hope so. If you feel like that after all the studying you've done, I guess there must be a heap of truth in what you say. It was a lucky thing for me that you happened to be watching when I jumped off that pier. I can't begin to tell you how grateful I am to you."

"Please don't say any more about that. You've already shown your gratitude in the best way you possibly could—by agreeing to help me with your willing and whole-hearted cooperation. This is going to be a wonderful event, my boy. I just feel it in my bones. It is going to bring everlasting fame to both of us."

"Let's hope so," I chimed in. "And now, if you don't mind, I'll hit the hay. This has been a strenuous day for me, and I think a little sleep will do me good."

I started toward the laboratory with the idea of entering the elevator and returning to my chamber on the floor above, but I was arrested by De Villa's voice: "Where are you going?"

"To my room. You needn't bother to go with me I found out how to operate the elevator."

"It won't be necessary for you to sleep there tonight. I designed that room merely to take

care of emergencies such as occurred last night. Now that you have decided to be sensible and reasonable, I have much more pleasant sleeping quarters for you."

He led me to a spacious bedroom located in a corner of the building. It had windows opening toward the south as well as toward the west.

"Aren't you afraid I'll sneak out on you?" I hinted.

"I'm sure there is no danger of that. I know I can trust you. Now that you understand everything thoroughly, you are free to do as you please."

"Thank you, Doctor. Thank you and good-night."

"Good-night and pleasant dreams," he said as he closed the door softly behind him.

Chapter 6 The Great Adventure

Bright and early the following morning I rolled out of bed, dressed and went to hunt up Doctor De Villa. I found him in the laboratory, working assiduously.

"Gee, but you are a hustler?" I exclaimed after we had exchanged greetings. "Don't you ever get any rest? It looks to me as if you are always working."

"Not always. I had six hours of refreshing sleep last night. That's plenty for me. There is so much to be done and so little

time in which to do it, that I can't afford to waste a single second. Are you ready?"

I began to feel a bit weak at the knees.

"Ready?" I stalled. "Aren't we going to have breakfast before we start?"

"I've already had my breakfast. I hope you don't think I'm unhospitable or inconsiderate, but it will be much better if you don't eat any breakfast; in fact, it would be very unwise for you to eat anything just before the operation. However, you don't need to worry about being hungry. I shall promise you a nice breakfast of orange honey, just as soon as you have come out from under the ether in the guise of an ant."

"All right, then. But before we start, let me ask you one thing more. After you have cut open the ant's head and have transplanted part of my brain to the insect's skull, won't it take quite a while for the wound to heal?"

"Only a few minutes. I shall not attempt to replace the section of the ant's skull. Instead I shall close the opening with a special kind of cement. It dries quickly, forming a shell that corresponds perfectly with the outer covering of the ant's head. Within an hour after the time I commence, you will be ready to be put back into the ant nest."

"And will you use the same

system when you bring me back again?"

"No. In that case I shall graft the bone back in place. It will take longer to heal, of course, but it will leave your head exactly as it is now."

"I'm glad to know that," I said with a gasp of relief. "Imagine the kidding I'd get if my friends found out I had a chunk of cement in my cranium!"

After I had repeated my readiness to proceed with the operation, Doctor De Villa got out a pair of clippers, a razor and a shaving brush.

"I'll have to give you a haircut and a shave," he declared. "That's for sanitary reasons, you understand. Don't worry about your hair—it will soon grow in again."

With surprising skill he clipped, lathered and shaved my head.

"Now we are ready for Miss Ant," he announced. "Would you like to help me, or do you think the sight of the brain would bother you?"

"It won't bother me in the least. I'm not at all squeamish."

Nevertheless, I did feel myself becoming faint when I saw the living, throbbing grey tissue exposed to view.

When his work of preparing the ant was completed, the surgeon placed over the insect's body a dome-like cover, which he clamped fast to the operating table.

"That will protect it against in-

fection while I am getting you ready," he explained.

As a final measure of precaution he lathered my head again and scrubbed it vigorously with a stiff brush. Then he opened the door of the volumeter and invited me to crawl inside.

When I reached the crucial point in the proceedings, I began to feel a sinking sensation in the region of my solar plexus, but I wouldn't for the world have allowed the doctor to know I was scared. To cover up my fright I attempted a rather feeble jest.

"By the way, Doc," I remarked as I was climbing into the chamber of the machine. "When you serve me that honey for breakfast would you mind letting me have some hot biscuits to go along with it?"

I stretched myself out at full length with my feet toward the door, which De Villa promptly closed.

Through the window I could see him as he adjusted the controls. Soon I distinguished the low hum which told me that the machine was in operation. I waited for a series of strange sensations, but nothing of the sort did I notice. The only change I observed was that the chamber in which I was confined seemed to become slightly smaller. Then it expanded again to its former size. Before I could realize what happened, the door opened, and I heard the doctor's voice call

out, "All right, Kenneth. Can you wiggle out yourself, or do you want me to help you?"

When I was standing beside him again, he asked me, "You didn't notice any unpleasant sensations did you?"

"Not a bit. In fact, I had no unusual sensations at all—either pleasant or unpleasant."

"Very well. Now, suppose you lie down on this other operating table." He punched a hole in a can of ether and placed a cone over my face. I filled my lungs with the sweet, penetrating vapor. My body began to feel pleasantly numb. I was floating off into space, supported in some mysterious manner on a bed of swirling clouds. Then I took one more deep breath and lost consciousness completely.

When I came to, my surroundings seemed bewilderingly strange to me. My eyesight was somewhat dim, but what it lacked in intensity, it made up in range of vision. I noticed a shiny, polished surface, evidently some metal part of the laboratory equipment, and stood in front of this makeshift mirror. I was startled to see the heads of several ants staring back at me. I learned later that it was my own head, duplicated many times by the multiple lenses of my ant eyes, which enabled me to see things in several different directions at the same time.

But the sensation that was up-

permost in my mind was that of smell. I detected the most delightful odor, which seemed to thrill me through and through. It wasn't long before I discovered the honey which, true to his promise, Doctor De Villa had placed in front of me. After I had eaten a generous portion of it and had stowed away some more in my crop, I became obsessed with the idea that I must return to my home and share my treasure with my comrades.

Then I felt the floor on which I was standing move. I was lifted up and deposited in some sort of receptacle. Followed then a great deal of jolting and tossing about which I attributed to the effects of an automobile trip. Finally something grasped hold of me, and I was deposited on the soft, warm earth. I soon became aware of the presence of other ants who were hustling back and forth, too busy to pay any attention to me. There were two lines of them, moving in opposite directions. Those going one way were carrying bits of leaves in their mandibles, while the others had no burdens at all.

As I stood there for an instant wondering what to do next, one of the ants, who was slightly separated from the rest of the line, stopped in her tracks and began waving her antennae around. Apparently she had seen me or caught my scent. She approached me and began to size me up. It

was a very thorough examination she gave me, exploring my entire body with her quivering antennae and sniffing excitedly. She seemed to understand that there was something unusual about me, and I began to fear that I would not pass muster. It appeared, however, that her final judgment was in my favor, for she began to stroke my head in a most affectionate manner.

Before I realized what was happening, I felt a very pleasant sensation and a droplet of honey which I had instinctively disgorged from my crop appeared on the end of my soft spongy tongue. Instantly my companion pressed her mouth to mine, kissing me with all the fervor of a loving sister and swallowing the drop of honey contentedly.

This was my first experience with the ceremony of regurgitation, which plays an enormously important part in the life of every ant. The word "ceremony" is the proper designation for this act because it is always conducted in a formal, almost reverent manner. The ants are able to practice it universally because of a peculiar part of their physical make-up. This organ is the crop, which may well be called a "social stomach". In it the ant deposits and stores liquid food which is not digested but is kept intact. Only a small part of this food can get into the digestive system of the ant carrying it.

The sole purpose of the food storage is a philanthropic one, namely, that of feeding her companions. Here is an example of Christian spirit that cannot be duplicated elsewhere. The ant is the most charitable of creatures. She owns nothing—not even the contents of her own body. And so long as there is a drop of food left in her crop, she will give it away freely, not only to friends, but also to guests and in some cases even to enemies.

I don't want to give the impression that the ant looks upon regurgitation as an act of conscious charity. On the contrary, she does it instinctively and mechanically, and she gets an immense amount of enjoyment out of it. Among the ants it is literally true that "it is more blessed to give than to receive."

Perhaps this looks like a long



digression that has no bearing on my story. I can assure you, however, that it is extremely relevant and pertinent. It is impossible to understand the ant nature and ant character without having a clear idea of the important part which regurgitation plays among them.

Having thus been welcomed into my new environment with a kiss from one of my sisters, I immediately fell in with the procession of ants which was moving away from the formicary. Soon I came to the stem of a bush, upon which I climbed. Even without the examples set by my companions, I seemed to know exactly what to do. I crawled out on a leaf and chewed a slit in the form of a semi-circle. This formed a sort of flap, which I grasped in my mandibles, tearing it loose with a quick jerk. Back along the branch I ran, carrying the leaf particle in my pincers. By following on the heels of the others I found my way back to the nest. Here we dropped the leaf fragments. They were picked up by other ants who were considerably smaller than the rest of us. These "home-bodies" never went more than a few inches beyond the opening of the nest. Their job was to carry the leaf particles inside and to get them ready for their ultimate purpose. Though I was still in the dark regarding the function which the leaves were to perform, I

seemed to understand clearly that all this work had something to do with our food supply.

On one of my trips to the formicary I witnessed a horrible tragedy. For some time I had noticed one individual ant who had been acting in a very strange manner. Instead of joining in our work, she wandered about in an excited manner as if she were looking for something. Whenever she came close to any of the other ants, they would snap at her with their mandibles and chase her away. Once she came near me, and I noticed that although she looked exactly like the rest of us, she had a very unusual and unpleasant odor. In some mysterious manner I became aware of the fact that she was of the same nationality as my companions but belonged in another nest. Apparently she had strayed so far away from her own city that she had lost her bearings and had been unable to find her way home again.

Finally she had the temerity to crawl right to the opening of our nest. Before she had time to enter, she was accosted by a terrible creature. It was an ant all right, and in some respects it resembled the little leafbearers very closely. On the whole, however, it looked like an entirely different species of insect. Compared to its tiny sisters its size was enormous. I estimated that it must have been at least two-

thirds of an inch in length. Its head was much larger proportionately than the rest of its body and was armed with a huge and wicked-looking pair of pincers. It was clearly evident that those mandibles were built for fighting rather than for labor.

The gatekeeper made a quick inspection of the intruder and condemned her on the spot. Before he could carry out his sentence, however, he was joined by five other warrior ants who were equally fierce and powerful. Between them they seized the luckless visitor and literally tore her to pieces.

In this manner, our citadel was constantly being guarded against our foes and even against harmless visitors. It seemed to be an inexorable law of Antdom that all outsiders—even those belonging to the same species—were enemies who must be slain on sight. The ants had even gone to the extent of developing a special type of individual who was wonderfully adapted for its particular work as a policeman, soldier and guardian of the nest.

Though this suggested an extra guarantee of safety to those within the ant city, it gave little comfort to me while I was still outside the nest. I realized suddenly that in order to get inside the formicary I would have to run the gauntlet of these six inexorable defenders. To be sure I seemed to have been accepted

by all the other leaf-bearers I had encountered. On the other hand, I couldn't forget the excitement that had been caused by my first meeting with one of the small ants. I had been accepted and welcomed, it was true, but I couldn't help wondering if I would be equally so fortunate when the time came to face the gatekeepers who were specially trained in detecting the presence of strangers.

I realized, however, that I would have to do it sometime before night came, so I tried my best to screw up my courage for the crucial attempt. In this I was aided somewhat by a group of my companions who suddenly quit carrying the leaf particles and started to file into the nest. This would make it easy, thought I. All I needed to do was to join the procession. Surely the guardians would not notice anything peculiar about me when I was with a gang of others who looked just like me.

When I crawled through the opening, however, I soon found out that I would have to submit to inspection. Not a solitary one of my fellow workers got by the sentries without being challenged. It looked as if they were exchanging a pass-word of some sort, but in reality, the guardians were identifying each individual by the sense of smell. When it came my turn to be smelled, I felt a bit shaky at the

(Continued on page 154)

While it's true that as a field magazine science fiction has tended to shrink a bit in the last few years—both in number of magazines and in total readership—here at Fantastic we don't at all agree with those who take this as growing evidence of a decline. For despite such gloom, top-flight favorites like Jack Vance, Frank Herbert and Roger Zelazny still stay very much with us. And talented newcomers such as young Peter Tate—a Welshman, who herewith makes his American debut—keep cropping up frequently enough for us to wonder just how such talk gets started anyway.

The Thinking Seat

All their hover-hopping way along the autoshelf, they could watch how the sea crawled mechanically on the imported beaches.

They tumbled through Playa 107, a nucleus in a cloud of Spanish-simulant dust, unseeing and unseen as neon-spotters probed the customer belt and fisherballoons jiggled in the wind of their passing.

"Join the Firmfishers," begged an audio-streamer across the main street. "Begin with Endswim," pleaded the rubber-buoy suit-sellers.

by PETER TATE

Illustrated by GRAY MORROW

Charlie Haldane came out onto the porch of his brainchance casino on the promenade of Playa 108. His radaroute had shown him the hopper moving along the coast at constant speed. The nearer it comes, the better the chance for me, he thought.

He stepped off the sidewalk and propped himself carefully against the "UQ for IQ" display board. He rattled a pair of formulae dice in his pocket.

Came the sound of a breeze—Charlie was old enough to remember the sound and fashion the metaphor. The hopper came

unveiled through the calella spiderwork, across the watered streets.

Charlie moved into the middle of the road and cleared his throat. The hopper was upon him.

"Minds meet within . . ." he began.

The slipstream spun him back onto the sidewalk, his *pi* tie tangled about his scrawny neck. That was the last he saw of Dulles and Rada and they of him.

"I read an Aldiss once," said Dulles, talking for his own sake and unconcerned whether Rada could hear. "Folk on the beaches with their deck-chairs turned inland."

He paused. He prompted himself. "Glub-glub people on a day-trip to the landside."

He looked down again on the lifeless, gelatine ocean.

Rada chuckled behind him. She might have heard or might simply be enjoying the prospect of Playa 109, somewhere ahead along the autoshelf, the latest of the instant happiness resorts that had mushroomed along California's Pacific Coast.

She chuckled again. Dulles was moved to inquire the reason.

"You think of *some* things," she said. "Glub-glub people."

"It's true—well, it's printed fiction, paper reality."

Dulles had grown accustomed to the obscurities, the mystery memories of words read and



scenes absorbed which pushed themselves unbidden into his mind at sudden appropriate moments. But he still thrilled to their relevance. Lack of outside appreciation left him unreasonably impatient.

"It is all written," he said again.

"All right, all right."

Rada, her arms circling his waist, exerted an affectionate pressure. She was aware of Dulles's introversion. She was also aware that sometimes it rode painfully close to a vicious self-indulgence.

And she was sadly resigned to the fact that his show of feeling for her was occasional, seldom demonstrative and always virginal.

Studying him deeply in the short time she had known him, she had attributed his attitude, in turn, to shyness, to lack of interest, to self-love, to habitual detachment. The latter, she felt, was about as close as she would ever get—at least she could reconcile it with his infrequent displays of emotion.

Playa 109 differed only in minute detail from the other beach-towns along the coast. They could have stopped at any, but the attraction of 109 was in its newness, in the chance of finding something its ancestors lacked.

Dulles guided the hopper into the first scootel, dispatched the

air curtain and closed the finger-texture lock on the control panel.

He dismounted, slapping life back into his legs. Then he gave Rada his arm while she tested stiff knee joints

They walked together to the check-in unit.

Rada watched while he identified himself and button-booked their reservation. She experienced a purely feminine pang when she saw he had digitized two single rooms and a second pang when the unit registered assent.

Ten years past, only the most masochistic swimmer would have ventured onto the chilly beaches of Western California, and the country behind the coast was fast becoming depopulated as farmers forsook their hapless spreads and moved into the cities in search of bread.

The shore had been narrow, rocky, virtually straight.

Now, the U.S. Republic, on instruction of the Congressional Committee on Retreating Tourism, had constructed offshore islands and bars, breakwaters and lagoons and small curving bays. It had even sprinkled fine white sand along the coastline in an effort to emulate the Mediterranean beaches that had taken all the holiday trade.

By fortunate accident, carry-off water from the nuclear desalination plant at Point Concepcion, fed into the sea by a long pipe-

line half a mile offshore, together with by-produced brine from the plant had combined with the sea to raise water temperature within several miles of the coast to a constant 70 to 75 degrees Fahrenheit.

Summer fogs, on-shore winds had all gone. So had majestic spray-falls and exciting tides. Even so the holiday people came—but there were some amongst them who mourned the passing of the wild-state sea.

The combers had their own bar on the outskirts of Playa 109. They were combers only by appearance and conversation, because where there was no rise and fall, there was little glamour along the high-water mark.

But they did, at least, have their own culture. Gogan, his hands forever moving over the whorled conch shell which—put to the ear—carried an echo of the past, had a poetry that somehow conveyed their thoughts and scripted their souls.

Today, however, bearded Gogan was silent with his eyes fixed on the sutoshelf.

He saw the hopper pass and noted how the girl clasped the waist of a man with a face he knew rather than recognized.

He wanted the girl instantly. Not in any physical sense, but because it would be a compliment to his ego to have her so; because the man and he were

alike, probably even in what they desired of women. He wanted not so much to gain the girl but to deprive the man. If they were of the same mould, as he believed, possession of the girl would give him a permanent edge.

He watched the hopper until it disappeared around a curve in the shelf. Only when it passed out of sight did he wonder whether it might not keep right on going.

Then he looked back at the lifeless sea, and the words started.

"Me in sea-spin," he said.

"Cool it," shouted Vangoj, his literary lieutenant. "Cool everything. Gogan speaks with the tongue of tongues."

Gogan rose from his stained wooden chair and planted his left buttock on the balcony rail.

"Man, men, I'm morbid, men," he said.

*"To choke upon the salt
To be fish cabaret
To find some blind gestalt
In rotting scupperway
Drowning forever down
Locked in whale-belly cell
With ribbed roof
And floating coral headstone."*

"It's coming on strong," shouted Vangoj in the studied pause for effect.

"It's beginning to begin," echoed the disciples. "Happen it will happen."

*"To suck on Neptune's tide
Prompt storm and thunder
Call mermaid to my side
To tether hair where
The sea-horse reins—"*

He stood up abruptly to signify the conclusion. He bowed his head. The weatherworn trestle tables swayed and crumpled beneath the heavy hand of acclaim.

The combers left them where they had fallen. There was one ritual still to come.

Gogan held the huge conch to his ear, one hand supporting its weight while the other moved in the fashion of a caress across the surface.

"Simpatico sea," he said finally. "Water with us."

The combers set about restoring the tables.

Dulles and Rada, out walking as Playa 109 began its loud night's journey into day, passed the bingo settlement and its tight-lipped, nervous residents without a second glance.

They took the rotor road through the midway but were disenchanted. Rada, though she would have felt more comfortable blaming the silence on the morose Dulles, had to admit that there was little to draw them from the road.

Dulles was thinking, it isn't me. Something outside me takes the words away. Something

about the world makes me afraid to speak for fear of ridicule.

He watched the faces around him, the parents guiding children up helter-skelter steps; the hard youths and harder girls scowling through the tri-di tent and making jagged progress in the shatter palace; the empty, fortyish women heading for the bingo settlement with its promise of money and light and greedy camaraderie.

"Futile," he said.

Rada drew closer, anxious that she should not miss a word.

"No depth," she said, trying to match his thought pattern. "People going nowhere, wasting time like mad."

But Dulles, cast in upon himself, was aware of only one speaker. He had little time, he told himself, for the clichés outsiders made to keep up with him. Then he thought, Why take it out on Rada? Why take it out on me?

He stopped and turned her to face him gently.

"I'm sorry," he said, and kissed her lightly, noting the way she clung at the least opportunity, sad and sick with his own inadequacy.

"Fun by order jars on me. These people don't have the capacity to feel real happiness."

"And you do, I suppose," she chided with no thought of malice. "You with the long face are the really happy one."

He kissed her again. "No," he

said, "I'm not happy. I was never meant to be happy. I am just sad and stupidly deep enough to realize that the other people are missing something despite their laughter. And I call them shallow with such contempt because I envy them their ignorance."

Rada guided him out of the fairground and on to the coast road, but there was little relief in the autoshelf, which had been hacked out of the cliff-face, though she could just make out a path winding upward to some ruined split-levels that had once been retreats for the artists and admen of the fifties and sixties. Beyond them, the path disappeared over the rim of the cliff. There might be some kind of silence up there.

She led Dulles unprotesting up the path, the canned clamor of Playa 109 receding as they climbed.

At one time, there must have been a sizeable settlement on the cliff-top. Trees had been carefully planted to provide a break from the one-time wind, and Swedish-style houses—now fallen away—nestled in the hollows.

They could see that rusty railings followed the line of the cliff-edge. An area in the rough centre of the settlement had been kept clear of development.

Though it was long overgrown, it was still possible to see that this had been some kind of play

area. Mysterious shoulders of tubular steel thrust upward to support the night.

Dulles and Rada, hand in hand, walked toward them.

Chains dangled from horizontal spars. At the end of the chains, wooden . . .

"Seats?" asked Dulles.

"They're the right height," said Rada. She ran a hand over one of the two seats.

"They seem to be worn smooth by some regular kind of use."

She sat on one of the seats experimentally. The chains wailed in protest, but held. She lifted her feet clear of the ground. The seat began a gentle, swinging motion. She clasped the chains and flung her weight backwards.

"On the pendulum principle," said Dulles. "Do you think I could . . ."

"Try," said Rada. "If you break one, who will miss it?"

He sat down and began his own rocking. He threw himself backwards. Some child instinct made him stiffen his legs as he returned forward, promoting the impetus.

The rusted joints shrieked above them like sea-birds wakened suddenly and frightened without the sun.

"You know what?" he shouted. He was above her, below her, above her again before she called back, "What?"

And by that time, all he wanted

to say was "What what? What did I ask you?"

Back of the promenade away from the noise, one came upon a graceful, sound-proofed menagerie of many abstract spires where expressionists of wind and limb gathered to produce their gospels. And there always those with respect for what might be a talent because it was too diffuse and introverted to be seen for what it really was, those who would pay money for a part of it, just in case.

It was on these amateur aficionADOS that Gogan depended for his slothful livelihood. His comber friends, appreciative perhaps, had no money to throw.

Each night, Gogan entered the poetry zone and introduced himself to the open mouths with one hand clasp ing a loud-hailer and the other cradling his shell.

There he was tonight, head picked out by a messianic spotlight, beginning the words.

"Writ on a corner in Playa 109," he said. "Writ in my head, that is."

The audience applauded dutifully and waited.

*"It's the truth that stumbles man
And cools him in his tracks
But people are changing
People know they're changing."*

The crowd murmured, still seeking the stamp of genius. So far there was only a certain turn

of phrase, a spontaneity, a relevance.

*"Lies have meaning
And I only learn the meaning
Even when I thought them
meaningless
I scratched and crawled and
prayed a meaning
It wasn't just word embroidery
There were bills to pay
Hailing God and Devil
I'd a whole mind to bargain
with them."*

Dulles and Rada, exploring the backbone of Playa 109, still heady and close with their shared elevation, came suddenly upon the art center and move into it, attracted by the Voice through deserted sculpture zones, paint zones, glass zones, to the poetry.

"I'd an innocence, I'd a seriousness," they heard Gogan say as they settled into seats.

*"I'd a humour save me from
amateur philosophy
I am able to contradict my
beliefs
I am able able
Because I want to know the
meaning of everything
Yet sit I like a brokenness
Moaning: On what responsibility
I put on thee Gogan
Death and God
Hard hard it's hard—"*

Dulles applauded, intrigued by the familiarity of the words. It could well have been that they

expressed his feelings in much the same way that he expressed them to himself. He dug for a more specific reference, found none and was therefore content to allow that Gogan had spoken his own thoughts.

He watched the man with a new interest. Shortly, the words came again.

"Writ with one buttock on the balcony of Gogan's Bar," said Gogan. "Writ on the buttock. So I'll quote."

There were a few awkward laughs.

Gogan placed the loud-hailer on the floor and draped himself over a reversed chair, his hands moving on the ridged surface of the shell.

*"Now I'm a guy who
even if he does see that way
still won't stick till end of day."*

"The hell with that," he said without pausing for breath, caressing the conch ceaselessly like a spinster fondling a favorite cat.

"Yesterday I ran with man today I stay and tomorrow"—he paused—"makes its own pace."

Dulles craned forward in his chair because the man's next words were important. Fleeting-ly, he felt guilty that another man should possess so much of him. But perhaps the man did not know. In fact, how could he possibly know?

*"Some days I see all people
In deep pain with life
And other days
I see them victors
Living things great as to ques-
tion their living . . ."*

Gogan fell silent as Vangoj, back from the scootel, fluttered on to the stage and pressed a piece of paper into his hand.

The paper contained just one word—"Dulles." Gogan shielded his eyes against the spotlight. He saw the girl before he saw the man, and having seen her, knew what he must do.

*"To see-saw back and fore like
that
and not go nuts is something,
something Dulles climbed hills
to swing out of . . ."*

Dulles heard his name but had so committed himself that the reference passed almost unregistered . . .

*"And you, Gog Dulles,
what see you in all your lead
sceneries?"*

Rada shifted uncomfortably on her chair.

"How much more of this . . ." she began. But she could see Dulles was beyond mere words. She stood up. He paid no attention. She made a pretense of stretching her legs, careful that her movement should interfere with his view of the stage.

When he offered no reaction, she sat down again. Gogan had watched the pantomime with a faint amusement.

"Loud Skinny Vision of Sin," he shouted, to recall attention.

"Sin sin sin sin

People is sin

World is sin

All is sin

*If i mount the cow of hate
with its sinful crooked eye
slicking the world to sin with
tail*

Sin is milk warmed over

Sin is nice spelled backward

Sin is calf cooking well

Sin is good fried rare

with mushrooms . . ."

"I'm leaving," said Rada with sudden decision. "You can stay if you like."

Dulles did not even notice her departure. It was some time later that he said, "Pardon," and turned to find the adjoining seat empty. He pondered only momentarily before he let his eyes drift back to the stage.

"I am thingy about sin

Sin is 30 years old

and out of right mind

Sin is being left brained

awake or dying

Sin pays the rental

for matters mental . . ."

Now, fewer of Gogan's utterances had any special significance for him. Occasionally, a

phrase took a handhold on his mental structure and clung to his thoughts.

At the same time, he was aware that the words had a familiarity that did not owe itself completely to their relevance. He wondered whether he had heard them before or whether his memory banks were storing the words away faster than the interpolator section of his brain was feeding him the phrases in personal context.

"Ah but I'll stay crumpled

until that day

over Cow's leather balconies

then threw up landscapes . . ."

Gogan bowed lazily to the scattered thunder of applause, rose from the chair and slouched from the stage. The crowd began to disperse, but Dulles sat where he had fallen seemingly hours ago. A shadow hovered above him. Gogan lowered himself into the seat once occupied by Rada.

"So your chick blew," he said.

The words grated on Dulles. They were shaped for effect and unoriginal, foreign to a poet.

"The lady who was with me left," he said. "Yes, that's right."

"Why?"

Dulles did not feel disposed to be diplomatic with the man.

"I got the impression she didn't like your—poetry."

Gogan was unperturbed.

"Such people exist. But you stayed on."

"Yes. I found something in what you said."

"You were meant to."

"Why me particularly?"

"You look like somebody who could make use of my philosophy."

"So you pick us out and then bestow your benefits."

Dulles did not like Gogan. That was definite, the most tangible emotion Dulles had felt for some considerable time.

"You don't have to like me," said Gogan, as though he had read the thoughts. Lesser men might have been confused into giving him credit for the power. Dulles knew as much had been evident in his tone.

"Do I have to like it? Is that part of it?"

"No, it doesn't matter to me. You felt some kind of attraction, or you wouldn't have stayed. You can admit what you like."

Dulles watched the plum hands moving on the shell.

"It probably doesn't," he said.

Gogan brooded for perhaps fifteen seconds. "Doesn't what?" he said finally.

"Matter to you."

Another pause. The hall had emptied, and now the silence hung heavy beneath the dome.

"Anyhow," said Dulles impatiently, becoming immediately engrossed in the echoing progress of the three syllables around the sector.

"I want the girl," said Gogan.

"I'm sorry . . ."

"The girl. I mean to have her."

"Which girl? The girl who was with me?"

"No less."

"Why?"

Dulles was aware of the stupidity of the question immediately after he had framed it.

"All right," he said quickly,

"I can work that out for myself. Why tell me?"

"I like to give fair warning."

"Thanks." Dulles was amused.

He could not see Rada accepting the advances of the man whose language she had so late rejected. "As long as you don't expect me to give her to you with all due ceremony and a chorus of Muses."

"That could be cool," said Gogan acidly. "Or like you might not know anything about it."

"And you can drop the hip talk," said Dulles. "It sounds as phony as some of your poetry."

"Listen, dad," Gogan flared, "unless you're inside me saying it, you don't have any right to call it phoney. Besides . . ."

He stood up and seemed to be waiting for Dulles to follow, but Dulles made no move. "You might just as well come," said Gogan. "In her eyes, you've committed yourself to me anyhow. Or don't you understand that?"

"When I need a translation of your works, I'll let you know. As

for committing myself, the *id* belongs to me and nobody else."

"You may have trouble convincing her of that. Well, come and see us, anyhow."

And since it seemed like a dare, Dulles went.

The say on the edge of Gogan's bar and watched the sky lightening. There had been a rough general introduction at the beginning, but no attempt to draw Dulles into the recreations of the group.

Dulles sat with his back to them, only too conscious of the psychotropic boosts that traveled from arm to arm and the various kinds of behavior that followed. Gogan sat beside him, wordless.

He felt something like an early affection for the man. At least Gogan seemed to realize that conversation, far from promoting thought, pushed it right out of existence.

When the California sun hoisted itself on bloody fingers over the cliffs behind Playa 109, he decided he should return to the scootel.

He stood up, stiffly. Gogan took his feet off the railings which bordered the open-air bar.

"Home time?" he asked.

"No point in staying," said Dulles. "I don't know what I was supposed to learn . . ."

"Nothing," cut in Gogan. "Nothing at all. Well, don't fall in the sticky sea. And I hope your lady

is waiting faithfully for you."

"It's not that kind of a relationship," said Dulles, more as an explanation than as a protest.

The night spent in each other's company, though the words had been scarce and the growth of any link not once encouraged, had made him less anxious to take offense. Fighting the man seemed unimportant when there was no apparent advantage to be gained.

Dulles descended to the auto-shelf and followed the pedistrip around the bay. It was early, and the walker mechanism had not been started for the day. He used his legs and was glad of the exercise.

When he eventually let himself into his room, Rada was waiting.

He wondered how she had entered, and then realized that since her time-pass key was identical to his own, she had access to his room and he to hers.

"Good morning," he said loosely.

Rada watched him scornfully.

"The poet's just sat down," she said.

"No. As a matter of fact . . ."

"As a matter of fact, you went back to his place, and he gave a private recital."

"You know."

"It was obvious from the start. I didn't have to follow you."

"What was obvious?"

"The way that bearded . . . minstrel attracted you.

Dulles struggled silently for the means to explain.

"It wasn't so much the man," he said.

"Of course not."

". . . as the words he used."

"He set you up," Rada said contemptuously. "He seduced you."

"Seduced me! For crying out loud . . ."

"Oh, don't play the dewy-eyed innocent. There must be some reason why I don't interest you."

Dulles could feel the conversation receding beyond his grip.

"But I am interested in you . . ."

"As what? As a salve to your flagging ego because you are so ashamed of yourself?"

"Look . . ."

"I've sat here all night, and I've finally figured it out. You don't have to explain anything to me. It is a chemical accident. It is nobody's fault. They . . . you . . . are to be pitied. I know all the excuses . . ."

"Shut up," shouted Dulles, his voice shrill with panic. "It isn't like that at all. There was nothing. We just sat. We didn't even speak. I don't even know why he asked me there because there seemed no purpose . . ."

"Dulles," said Rada coldly, "there is no need for you to say anything. I'm sorry I imposed myself on you for so long."

She stood up and walked towards the door. Dulles made a

weak attempt to halt her, but she brushed him aside.

"Rada," he said quietly, "God, Rada, listen to me."

But she was gone. And suddenly, Dulles knew Gogan's purpose.

He swung alone in the darkness, gripping tightly to his vehicle. He could have been somewhere at the back of space, but his feet dangled a scant few inches above the ground, occasionally brushing tall blades of grass.

Gogan, he thought, aware of a certain insight that came with the tidal movement. An unhappy man who would seek to deprive everyone of their ration of joy.

He sees a couple, he works to make them separate. He finds a smile, he slaps it with words until it becomes a down-turned mouth. Hence the poetry of pessimism, the preoccupation with evil and its deserts.

The rusty hinges tolled their aggrement above his head.

He pushed hard with his feet; he thrust himself backwards propelling the swing higher and higher until the joints jerked in protest and he had to slow down, his stomach chilled with the prospect of accidental launching.

He folded his arms around the chains and clasped his hands. He let the swing take him where it would.

Then there was Rada. The ex-

change that morning had been short and violent and that, in itself, might be a virtue.

When she came to consider it coldly, Rada would realize that her case was purely circumstantial. A night of waiting could produce all manner of delusions. Next time he saw her, she would probably apologize.

He drifted gently above the grass. There was no moon, but his eyes had grown accustomed to the darkness.

The other swing hung motionless a few feet from his own. There was little about it now to remind him that he and Rada had once rode feet-first to the stars.

Sadness welled momentarily. He kicked his own swing back into motion savagely and closed his eyes, trusting the breeze thus produced to free his mind of Rada. And it did.

In this great creaking cradle, he thought of tumbling seas far beyond the feeble trickle on the beaches below. His mind climbed trees and clung to leafy rigging as it teetered above the tilting earth.

He was a child flying on a great black, crying bird who showed him wonderful lands veiled in darkness, the bird crying for the sun.

Suddenly, sunlit memories trembled about him and he picked at them, laughing, thrust-

ing, kicking the present out of sight.

And then, just as suddenly, they were gone and he was alone in darkness, with the swing losing impetus, and he was listening desperately to scrabbling footsteps and two voices.

He flung himself silently from the swing and landed on his knees in the grass. He moved at a crouch away from the swing, the one still idling to a halt, the other so still that it could be impaled to the ground.

He reached an ancient roundabout, feeling the hand-rails quiver beneath his touch. He sat down on its footboard so that his head would not be outlined in the night's dull luminance. Then he waited.

"Someone's been here," said the girl, feeling the movement still in the left-hand swing.

"But gone, baby," said the man. "That's the main thing, gone."

They sat down. They levered with feet against the ground. They thrust and recoiled, recoiled and thrust, and the twin swings bore them speedily aloft.

"I'm a silkie on a survey," shouted the man.

"I'm a siren swinging for kicks," shouted the girl.

"Kicksville. The sea folk cometh . . ."

For Dulles, slinking away across the moist grass, the straining joints complained like battered bed-springs.

Dulles skipped from the pedistrip and climbed the steps to the bar.

In full daylight it was unjumbled only because it lay under the enormity of the sky. Three-legged tables, two-legged chairs were heaped in one corner.

Well-scattered among the trestles, combers lay with their heads cradled on ragged sleeves.

Gogan sat alone at the bar, swilling a drink in a glass. He raised a hand in greeting as Dulles weaved his way across the rock floor. Dulles nodded in return.

"Drink?"

Dulles was about to agree when he noted the begrimed state of the glass. "Too early," he said. "Sun and schnapps don't mix for me."

Gogan refilled his own glass. "I knew you'd come back," he said.

"Why?"

"Whatever you may not find here, daddy, what you *do* find is closer to what you want than you'll find anywhere else."

"And what do I want?"

"Something sincere. Something—ephemeral. You're a dreamer like I am. You don't care very much for the way things are going."

"So far so good, But you could tell that by the way I stopped to listen the other night. Dreamers are pretty unsubtle people . . ."

"What did your girl say afterwards?"

Gogan's expression was one of polite curiosity. Dulles wondered how best to answer, but did not let his indecision show.

"Nothing," he said eventually. "I told you before I don't have to answer to her."

Gogan, the man on his swing—strange how it had suddenly become *his* swing—Gogan would know he was lying. Let him wonder whether there was a reason beyond pride for the lie. Let him puzzle out the Dulles strategy.

"Great," said Gogan almost without pause. "You have her well-trained."

"She knows the way things are . . . Anyhow, I didn't come here to talk about my romance. I've been noticing the way you seem to mourn the sea."

"That's true," said Gogan, surprised. "This lukewarm treacle stinks of syntheticism. All this bloody high-powered bliss up and down the coast. It makes me sick to my stomach . . ."

"'Vomiting landscapes'," said Dulles.

"I wish I was," said Gogan. "One time I did paint when there was some kind of spontaneity to push the brush."

"But surely you could have kept on painting—inspiration went out of the art a long time ago, as far as I can see, and there was deterioration for a long time before that. The great cri-

terion was output at the end of it, not style . . ."

"Output was the great thing," said Gogan. "But painting takes too long. I have a certain turn of phrase. People pay to hear me talk—some even call it poetry. To me it's more of a language."

He moved his arm absently on the bar counter and jogged the great conch at his elbow. He used both hands in the attempt to prevent it from falling on the floor. His glass shattered but he paid it no attention.

He simply cast around for another and, finding none, put the bottle to his mouth and swallowed noisily, his free hand grasping the shell, the fingers quivering slightly.

He saw Dulles was eyeing it curiously.

"I read a book once," he said. "About these kids marooned on a desert island with some kind of a war going on. They found a shell like this"—he opened his hand so Dulles could see more of the shell—"and they said whoever held it had freedom of speech. That didn't last very long. This—well, maybe it makes me some kind of spokesman. At least, Vangoj and the rest seem to think so . . . Vangoj, Man what a crazy name . . . He used to be a painter, too. Stopped when I did . . . Stopped because I did.

"Anyhow, the shell . . . I guess

it's more because it reminds me of what this California coastline used to be like—you know? Rugged seascapes, artists' split-levels, beaches where you could bathe raw and nobody see you. Seaside where you could do most things. Seaside where the sea *was* beside you and not some soulless bit of jelly oozing apologetically over the sand . . . s-s-s-l-l-l-p-p-p . . . sorry . . . s-s-s-l-l-l-p-p-p . . . sorry . . . s-s-s-l-l-l-p-p-p . . . sorry . . ."

Gogan paused. He took a long swallow from the bottle and then took the shell in both hands.

"Spanning the night-cold tide-line with the toes," he said, throwing vain hands to meet the flying wake of frolicsome suicidal bathers. He moves as if not to—but you know he'll finally go with a NOW FOR IT! and find warmth—"

Dulles, apparently listening impressed was trying to hold on to as many of the words as he could so that he could feed them into his memory banks later—perhaps upon on the swing. They had to mean something to him.

*"The curious warmth is too familiar
as when seashells
saw fit to walk
and embryo
found mouth and decided a
breath in the dry above the wet
There he toils for waves that
are years*

*homing on that strangest green
womb*

*He tenses—the sea is at um-
bilica level—
fighting unbirth.”*

Now Dulles was examining the texture of the verse. It was a little more onomatopoeic than the stuff Gogan had given out at the center—a change of style, maybe, if poets could change style.

*“But he feels scales along his
skin*

*He who hails the bronto as
brother*

*and what with mumbling crus-
taceans*

*oh they’re only busy sandcas-
tle-builders*

*yet it is feasible to flood the
lungs with too much air*

*bid the whole sphere one NOW
FOR IT! and once in*

already out again—”

The clapping came from among the trestle tables. Vangoj had raised his head at the sound of his master's voice.

“Man,” he stated, “isn't he the cat's behind? Isn't he the talking end?”

“I guess you could say that,” said Dulles.

Gogan had the shell held high and was brushing it with his lips.

“You came about the sea,” he reminded Dulles. “Have you got some kind of plan?”

“It could be. I need time to

work on it—but there's a way of bringing the chill back to these waters, and starting a few waves. I'm sure of it.”

“How?”

“As I said, I need time. These elements are artificially produced. It is a matter of putting the producer out of action. I'll come back and tell you when I've worked it out in detail.”

“Try for a bit of fog,” Gogan called after him as he descended the steps. “Think drizzle.”

Dulles thought drizzle all the way back around the autoshelf, while the sun hung like a memento dollar in the steely sky.

For two days Rada had been elusive, moving through the corridors of the scootel at unlikely times and always—outside or inside—away from Dulles.

He finally ran her to ground, his belly full of swallowed pride, at her bedroom trimirror, preparing to be off again.

“You know it isn't right, what you think,” he said. She went on with her make-up.

He sat down on the edge of the bed and considered his approach. He wanted Rada to believe him, but again there was the inner struggle to recognize what prompted the desire. I don't like to be considered queer, thought Dulles and left it at that.

“What do I have to do to prove what I say?” he asked.

Rada patted her hair and ex-

amined her eyes in the mirror.
"Well?"

"Surely that's up to you," she said, sharply, "I'm not bound to give it a thought."

"Don't make it any easier for me . . ."

"Should I?"

Such negative argument wore Dulles down very quickly.

"All right, I'll prove it. Then perhaps you'll be sorry you ever believed such a thing in the beginning."

"Put yourself in my place," she countered, and added, "but of course, you can't. You're your own man. You don't answer to anybody."

"When did . . ." he let slip and then steadied himself. He was against telling her that he knew of her pairing with Gogan because it made her position that much stronger, that much more able to whip him with the fact of his inadequacy. He rephrased his reply.

"When a girl demands an answer all the time, she takes too much on herself," he said. "When I give you an explanation for anything, you must believe what I say. Otherwise I just stop saying anything. Do you understand that?"

She shrugged as though she did not care to put her mind to it.

He wanted to strike some kind of fire into her stony, thin-lipped face. Bitch to put him through it. Bitch to bring him to the posi-

tion where he had to say, "I did this because . . ."

"I'll show you," he said. "Conclusively. At least, it will be conclusive to me. It will be up to you to recognize it for what it is."

"I don't have time," said Rada shortly.

She yearned for him to display some emotion indicative of affection. If he knew about Gogan, why didn't he say so? Why, for God's sake, couldn't he be jealous?

She had her suspicions about the slight movement she had found in the swing. But if Dulles did not admit the knowledge, she could not. Whether he knew or whether he did not, a revelation would be too hurtful to him. How much did she have to hurt him before he responded?

"Make it soon, daddy," she said with a brusqueness that betrayed no trace of the nausea it brought. "When I see my Gogan tonight, we'll be swinging."

But Dulles only rose and left the room quickly, closing the door with deliberate dignity behind him.

"Formation of hurricanes can be contained if excess heating and evaporation of ocean waters in the regions of hurricane genesis can be eliminated. A thin layer of organic salt of magnesium spread on the sea surface will deflect part of sunlight back into

space before it has a chance to heat the water . . ."

Dulles spun wondrously under the metallic sky, over the dusty cliff-top, listening to the words clicking away in his brain.

Just let them run their sweet course, he told himself. No prompting. No wrenching details out of context. You'll ruin the machinery . . .

The fluency faltered momentarily, tripped on a word. Conception. No, Concepcion—Point Concepcion, not three miles away.

"Huge dual-purpose plant for simultaneously converting sea water to fresh water and generating very large blocks of electric power, using nuclear reactor as energy source . . ."

Dulles, tumbling for earth, was scooped up by a gigantic hand at the seat of his pants and hurled feet first at the sky.

"Heat generated by plant must be carried off," he shouted out loud. "So must brine . . . Mixed, decontaminated, returned to ocean. Result? Warm, sticky sea . . ."

And then, suddenly, Dulles was entirely aware of his mobile surroundings—not because he wanted to be so aware, but because access to his memory banks had closed. Slam!

He shook his head, opened his eyes and let the breeze of his progress play on his pupils. It was no good.

He posed his mind a question.

How does one put a nuclear reactor out of action?

He waited a long time for the answer, until the swing fell to wandering idly from side to side and his feet dragged unnoticed in the turf.

How?

He goaded the swing into a more violent movement. He searched feverishly through snip-pets stored in the cerebrum cellar. He searched in vain.

The plain fact is, he told himself with disappointment lying like a sickness on his stomach—I never found out. I don't know. This hedge-begotten swing . . .

He cursed it as a man might scourge a lover who betrayed him. He did not pause to wonder at the way he cursed it or the reason its impotence bothered him.

"What the hell does it matter?" he asked out loud. "What does it matter what I tell them so long as I get them there?"

He ran his hand caressingly over the framework and brushed the sharp dust of old paint gently from his fingers.

"Writ on the steps of Puerto Rican Harlem," said his own voice, unbidden. "Writ in Horace Greely Square. "Something Miss Brody ran home to jump out of . . . and you, Mr. Greeley, what say you in all your bronze watchings . . ."

"Gregory Corso . . . 'Ah but I will look out before that date

thru Horse's fur windows and vomit landscapes!" Lawrence Ferlinghetti. The Beat Poets. The Greenwich Villagers at the vile Vanguard . . ."

Walking rapidly away from the playground, bound for the cliff-path, he threw a last glance over his shoulder. Thanks for the bonus, he prayed.

He had a plan and Rada could make what she would of his motives.

Three miles along the pedistrip, he drew a tattered piece of paper from his pocket and made a rough outline of the humped and morose building that squatted uncomfortably amidst the terrain of Point Concepcion.

Dulles drew for a long time in the thin layer of blown sand on the bar's rock floor. When he had finished, he stood back.

"It isn't very satisfactory," he said. As an afterthought, he drew a wavy perimeter around the outline.

"A slight fence," he said. "Not even electrified. No photo-cell circuits to avoid. The place is wide open. Who would want to raid a power-station, anyhow?"

Gogan hunched his shoulders. "Just a few sea-nuts like us, daddy," he said, only for the resultant laughter.

Dulles marked an "X" on one of the two connections between the station and sea, the wider of the two.

"The intake," he said loosely. "The other one is the tube that carries the heat and the brine back out to sea. Some kind of explosive planted in the intake would jam the station's function for a considerable time. Long enough, maybe, for the Heads to realize that there may be people not quite sympathetic with their ideas."

"Look," said Vangoj, "do we really want to stop the power supply? Couldn't we just damage the pipe that runs the heat into the sea?"

It seemed to make sense to him.

"And how long do you think your tides and tempests would last then?" Dulles spat at him.

"Man's right," said Gogan. "We have to do this thing right, people."

Rada squeezed between Dulles and Gogan and stared down at the drawing.

"Looks like fun," she said.

"No women," said Dulles. "At least . . ." He questioned his own hasty insistence. Surely, she had been . . . Well, he wished her no harm. He guessed he owed her that much.

He looked hard at Gogan. "Whether you take your women with you is up to you."

"What do you mean? Aren't you coming?"

"No. And as far as the fate of this girl lies with me, I say she's not going either."

Rada was silent. She wanted

to watch reactions. She was aware that Dulles seemed to be making some kind of provision for her, but she needed to know more about his intentions.

"Why?" Gogan was suspicious.

"I have to be frank with you," said Dulles. "I have been in trouble with the Heads before. They know me as a peace-lover, a hostile element to hostility. They know I may turn up anywhere with my fixation for past tradition."

"Is that a fact," said Gogan, still not convinced.

"I'll go with you if you like. But I'm warning you now—they'll have a photosolid file and an odorstat of me at that plant. You are new to them—your scent won't register as known. You won't have your own little spot on the electro-latency chart. I tell you, people—once you're known these days, there's no such thing as mistaken identity."

Gogan hesitated. The others waited for his response.

"Now you've told us the plan, we don't really need you," he said. "But you smell like a coward to me."

Dulles shoved him hard with one shoulder and snatched the shell from the bar.

"That doesn't sound like gratitude to me," he said softly. He swung the shell between lax fingers. He let it drop a few inches towards the floor and caught it.

Gogan started forward, stopped, fell back.

Dulles slammed the conch down hard on the bar-top, but kept his hand on it. Gogan shuddered. The others, watching Dulles, were not witness to their leader's agony.

"Gregory Corso," said Dulles, tossing the shell from hand to hand. "Lawrence Ferlinghetti. And Allen Ginsberg, too, I'll bet . . ."

"Stop," shouted Gogan. In the silence, only the conch moved, flickering as sunlight caught its crystalline surface.

"All right, you're no coward," said Gogan. "We have to talk."

He turned and walked away to a remote corner of the bar. Dulles followed, still tossing the shell up into the air.

"Give me the shell," said Gogan. "I'm pleading, daddy. A man has to have something."

"Your fetishism is no concern of mine," said Dulles. "The shell bit is the least of your perversions."

Gogan tugged the cork from a bottle he held and passed it to Dulles in a pretence of friendship. "Well, what's on your mind?"

"I want you to do this job," said Dulles, "and I don't see how you can get out of it. Not unless you want me to start telling your buddies about your second-hand soul. All those old Beat Poets from Greenwich Village."

He grinned mirthlessly. "I don't

say the Beat boys would enjoy your free helping from their works, but they'd give you all credit for performance . . ."

"What's the rub?" asked Gogan.

"Where's the rub?" Gogan corrected him. "If we're getting Shakespeare, let's get him right."

"Nuts," said Gogan. "What's the catch? Who gets killed? What's the catch?"

"No danger," said Dulles. "I just want a clear field with Rada, if you like. While you're helping yourselves to the seaside, I'll be up and away with the girl. It's that simple."

Gogan regarded him silently.

"I don't have to believe you . . ."

"True. But you have to do something. We can't just stand like this forever."

"They'll do as you say," said Gogan finally. "But when we come back, I'll get you somehow. What have you got against me, anyhow? Are you Jack Kerouac's grandson or something?"

"Nothing so devious. Just a night on the swings for two. And many swinging times after that."

"I thought, too," said Gogan, "that there'd been somebody there."

"But the main thing was that I'd gone," said Dulles. "That was the main thing."

"Great. Right, well how about my shell?"

"When you come back," said Dulles.

"But . . ."

"People," Dulles shouted. "I've got something to tell you about Gogan."

He propelled the man towards them with one hand and fondled the shell with the other.

"All right," said Gogan. He raised his voice. "We're going tomorrow morning. There'll be an evening tide."

"Those names," said Vangoj, later. "What's the signif?"

"People we knew," said Gogan. "People we didn't know we both knew."

Gogan stumbled aimlessly across the rocks towards Point Concepcion. He staggered to one peak and looked down on the massive desalinization plant. Late, he realized he was against the sky-line and dropped to his stomach, only to swear volubly as the conch, hidden in his shirt, dug into his chest.

Dulles had still been sleeping when he and the others left camp. Rada, who had crept close to him in the night, had pushed the shell gently from his hand so that she could link her fingers to his as they slumbered.

Gogan had nearly stepped on the shell as he and the combers had left the bar and fallen upon it and fondled its substantial weight with an alacrity that had not gone altogether unnoticed.

The others strong out in a rag-

ged line behind him now, came up level, crawling the last few feet to the summit.

Vangoj carried the satchel that contained the charge. Dulles had sealed the lunch pail and handed it to them with the strict warning that it was not to be opened. From within came an ominous hollow ticking.

Vangoj bellied his way across to Gogan. "Can you see anything that looks like an intake?" he asked.

Gogan ran an inexperienced eye over the plant-layout and then along the line of the sea.

"If we follow the beach," he said, "we'll come across it."

He had little enthusiasm for the maneuver and it showed, though he must not, he knew, transmit his reluctance to the others.

He must not allow the others cause to suspect that he might have been forced into the jaunt.

They might begin to doubt his ability to lead, never really proven and very shaky since Dulles had silenced him with his shell play.

"Let's move," he said, in an effort to sound decisive. He rose quickly and, crouching slightly, loped down the rough incline and on to the ribbon of beach that separated the plant from the sea.

He moved quickly on the firm sand, forcing the others to hurry, hoping that they would read resolution into his haste.

They rattled across the steel

catwalk that bridged a dull plastic pipe that ran from the bowels of the humming plant out along the sea-bed.

"Waste water carrier," said Vangoj breathlessly.

Gogan was vaguely aware of something unusual. It was a while before he realized that small waves were breaking on the beach.

He pointed them out to Vangoj.

"Some disturbance in the water," said Vangoj, the expert. "Like a whirlpool. Like suction."

"Then we must be close to the intake."

The party ran bent almost double, though it was more of a gesture to the non-existent air of conspiracy than a useful pose.

There was no cover for them and, had they thought about it, they would have been more deceptive wandering in their usual comber fashion along the tide mark.

But Gogan was concerned solely with planting the explosive and getting back to his bar and the comfort of a bottle.

The non-committal sound of moving water was loud now. The group mounted the concrete staging and clustered around the barrel door of the mekapump unit.

The did a slow circuit of the building, in search of a means of access and resolved finally that a window would have to be broken. They looked for some

missile to shatter the glass and found none.

Then Vangoj brought his eyes to rest on the shell Gogan had now transferred to his right hand.

"We'll have to use that."

"Get filled in."

"Look, we all know how much you value it. We'll be careful. Just a small hole near the shutter."

Gogan surrendered the shell. Vangoj sent glass flying with one brisk movement, thrust his hand inside the window and opened the shutter. Then he pulled himself up over the steel frame.

"No need to go in," he said. "I can just drop the bomb gently in among the machinery and we'll go. Dulles says it's all set. If anything goes wrong, it is his fault."

Gogan grunted, dusting his shell clean of Vangoj's fingerprints and licking the slight abrasion the jagged glass had made on the conch's surface.

"Right."

Vangoj was back amongst them, and they jumped to the sand and ran hard along the beach. They stopped at the point where Gogan had first noted the movement in the sea.

They squatted along the edge of the sea, listening to the delicate wash and such of the water.

"My saltman rise and laggard hair," said Gogan as he began

to relax. The others hummed contentedly.

"I make it about ten seconds," said Vangoj. "Then comes the sea to life."

"... invades my eyes

Up spin I, up

And wonder."

Gogan pressed the shell to his lips. He placed it to his ear. "Man, let's hear the tide begin," he said.

But the shell was dumb. He dug into it with his fingers and located powder.

"It's full up with something," he said.

"Sand," said Vangoj. "I bet that crumb Dulles filled it with sand just for devilment. Put it down in the shallows and let the sea wash it out... Hey..." —He paused and his face took on an expression of delight—"A ritual cleansing ceremony, what else? Dump it in the shallows, Daddy Gogan, and we'll adopt attitudes of worship."

Gogan placed the shell gently on the sand. He turned its mouth to face the oncoming of tide.

The combers knelt in a horse-shoe, hands clasped and heads bowed. In the silence, only the sea shuddered.

"The prayer, Daddy," prompted Vangoj. "Give the prayer. Ten seconds."

"To—to suck on Neptune's tide," said Gogan, tasting salt on his lips.

*"Prompt storm and thunder
Call the mermaid to my side..."*

"Now," yelled Vangoj.

And as the first terrible water trickled into its beckoning mouth, the shell exploded.

"If a man can be murderous for me," observed Rada, unthinking, watching her shadow grow beanstalk tall as she rode up and away from the earth.

"What?" Dulles, hard against his squat shadow had heard only broken syllables as he swooped past her, bound for landfall.

"What what? STOP!" shouted Rada.

Dulles steadied himself against the earth and waited. She drifted ever more slowly past his right side. She did not speak until she was entirely still.

"You said you'd do something positive," she said. Then she paused again. "Mur . . . killing

is positive. It could be taken to be a sign of jealousy . . ."

"Or a form of safeguard," said Dulles, his tired eyes cast far out across the plate-glass sea.

"Then you did it—to keep me?"

Rada laid a hand gently on his arm, silently begging him to turn his eyes upon her and share the warmth, praying he would take her into some awkward kind of embrace. But he freed his arm and dug purposefully with his heels.

"To keep you?" he queried, pushing himself ever higher. "To win back a trollop like you?"

He allowed himself a scant five seconds of dry laughter, but it scored Rada like thrown gravel. She strained her eyes to see him riding out of the sun. She heard only—"I . . . did . . . it . . . to . . . keep . . . my . . . seat . . . on . . . the . . . swing . . ."

The End

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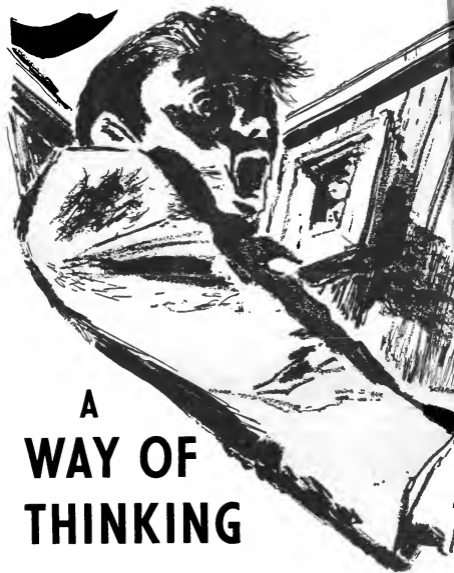
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A WAY OF THINKING

Much as we enjoy his occasional—usually non-s-f—stories in Playboy and other slicks, as well as his intermittent though sprightly reviews in William F. Buckley's National Review, we wish Theodore Sturgeon would consider returning to the field that appreciates him most—this one. For then we could all be enjoying more classics like "Killdazer," "Baby Is Three," and the following shocker about a sailor who exacts the most hideous kind of revenge on a doll that has murdered his brother!

I'LL have to start with an anecdote or two that you may have heard from me before, but they'll bear repeating, since it's Kelley we're talking about.

I shipped out with Kelley when I was a kid. Tankships, mostly coastwise: load somewhere in the oil country — New Orleans, Aransas Pass, Port Arthur, or some such, and unload at ports north of Hatteras. Eight days out, eighteen hours in, give or take a day or six hours. Kelley was ordinary seaman on my watch, which was a laugh; he knew more about the sea than anyone aft of the bridge. But he never ribbed me, stumbling around the place with my blue A.B. ticket. He had a sense of humor in his peculiar quiet way, but he never gratified it by proofs of the obvious — that he was twice the seaman I could ever be.



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There were a lot of unusual things about Kelley, the way he looked, the way he moved; but most unusual was the way he thought. He was like one of those extra-terrestrials you read about, who can think as well as a human being but not *like* a human being. Just for example, there was that night in Port Arthur. I was sitting in a honkytonk up over a bar with a red-headed girl called Red, trying to mind my own business while watching a chick known as Boots, who sat alone over by the jukebox. This girl Boots was watching the door and grinding her teeth, and I knew why, and I was worried. See, Kelley had been seeing her pretty regularly, but this trip he'd made the break and word was around that he was romancing a girl in Pete's place — a very unpopular kind of rumor for Boots to be chewing on. I also knew that Kelley would be along any minute because he'd promised to meet me here.

And in he came, running up that long straight flight of steps easy as a cat, and when he got in the door everybody just hushed, except the juke-box, and it sounded scared.

Now, just over Boots's shoulder on a little shelf was an electric fan. It had sixteen-inch blades and no guard. The very second Kelley's face showed in the doorway Boots rose up like a snake out of a basket, reached behind her, snatched

that fan off the shelf and threw it.

It might as well have been done with a slow-motion camera as far as Kelley was concerned. He didn't move his feet at all. He bent sideways, just a little, from the waist, and turned his wide shoulders. Very clearly I heard three of those whining blade-tips touch a button on his shirt *bip-bip-bip!* and then the fan hit the doorpost.

Even the juke-box shut up then. It was *so* quiet. Kelley didn't say anything and neither did anyone else.

Now, if you believe in do-as-you-get-done-to, and someone heaves an infernal machine at you, you'll pick it right up and heave it back. But Kelley doesn't think like you. He didn't even look at the fan.

He just watched Boots, and she was white and crazed-looking, waiting for whatever he might have in mind.

He went across the room to her, fast but not really hurrying, and he picked her out from behind that table, and he threw her.

He threw her at the fan.

She hit the floor and slid, sweeping up the fan where it lay, hitting the doorjamb with her head, spinning out into the stairway. Kelley walked after her, stepped over her, went on downstairs and back to the ship.

And there was the time we

shipped a new main spur gear for the starboard winch. The deck engineer used up the whole morning watch trying to get the old gear-wheel off its shaft. He heated the hub. He pounded it. He put in wedges. He hooked on with a handybilly — that's a four-sheave block-and-tackle to you — and all he did with that was break a U-bolt.

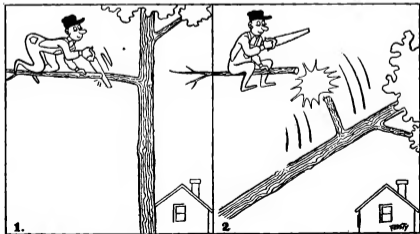
Then Kelley came on deck, rubbing sleep out of his eyes, and took one brief look. He walked over to the winch, snatched up a crescent wrench, and relieved the four bolts that held the housing tight around the shaft. He then picked up a twelve-pound maul, hefted it, and swung it just once. The maul hit the end of the shaft and the shaft shot out of the other side of the machine like a torpedo out of its tube. The gearwheel fell down on the deck. Kelley went

forward to take the helm and thought no more about it, while the deck crew stared after him, wall-eyed. You see what I mean? Problem: Get a wheel off a shaft. But in Kelley's book it's: Get the shaft out of the wheel.

I kibitzed him at poker one time and saw him discard two pair and draw a winning straight flush. Why that discard? Because he'd just realized the deck was stacked. Why the flush? God knows. All Kelley did was pick up the pot — a big one — grin at the sharper, and quit the game.

I have plenty more yarns like that, but you get the idea. The guy had a special way of thinking, that's all, and it never failed him.

I lost track of Kelley. I came to regret that now and then; he made a huge impression on me, and some times I used to think about him when I had a tough problem



to solve. What would Kelley do? And sometimes it helped, and sometimes it didn't; and when it didn't, I guess it was because I'm not Kelley.

I came ashore and got married and did all sorts of other things, and the years went by, and a war came and went, and one warm spring evening I went into a place I know on West 48th St. because I felt like drinking *tequila* and I can always get it there. And who should be sitting in a booth finishing up a big Mexican dinner but — no, not Kelley.

It was Milton. He looks like a college sophomore with money. His suits are always cut just so, but quiet; and when he's relaxed he looks as if he's just been tagged and it matters to him, and when he's worried you want to ask him has he been cutting classes again. It happens he's a damn good doctor.

He was worried, but he gave me a good hello and waved me into the booth while he finished up. We had small talk and I tried to buy him a drink. He looked real wistful and then shook his head. "Patient in ten minutes," he said, looking at his watch.

"Then it's nearby. Come back afterward."

"Better yet," he said, getting up, "come with me. This might interest you, come to think of it."

He got his hat and paid Rudy, and I said "*Luego*," and Rudy

grinned and slapped the *tequila* bottle. Nice place, Rudy's.

"What about the patient?" I asked as we turned up the avenue. I thought for a while he hadn't heard me, but at last he said, "Four busted ribs and a compound femoral. Minor internal haemorrhage which might or might not be a ruptured spleen. Necrosis of the oral frenum — or was while there was any frenum left."

"What's a frenum?"

"That little strip of tissue under your tongue."

"Ongk," I said, trying to reach it with the tip of my tongue. "What a healthy fellow."

"Pulmonary adhesions," Milton ruminated. "Not serious, certainly not tubercular. But they hurt and they bleed and I don't like 'em. And acne rosacea."

"That's the nose like a stop-light, isn't it?"

"It isn't as funny as that to the guy that has it."

I was quelled. "What was it — a goon-squad?"

He shook his head.

"A truck?"

"No."

"He fell off something?"

Milton stopped and turned and looked me straight in the eye. "No," he said. "Nothing like that. Nothing like anything. Nothing," he said, walking again, "at all."

I said nothing to that because there was nothing to say.

"He just went to bed," said

Milton thoughtfully, "because he felt off his oats. And one by one these things happened to him."

"In *bed*?"

"Well," said Milton, in a to-be-absolutely-accurate tone, "when the ribs broke he was on his way back from the bathroom."

"You're kidding."

"No I'm not."

"He's lying."

Milton said, "I believe him."

I know Milton. There's no doubt that he believed the man. I said, "I keep reading things about psychosomatic disorders. But a broken — what did you say it was?"

"Femur. Thigh, that is. Compound. Oh, it's rare, all right. But it can happen, has happened. Those muscles are pretty powerful, you know. They deliver two-fifty, three hundred pound thrusts every time you walk up stairs. In certain spastic hysteriae, they'll break bones easily enough."

"What about all those other things?"

"Functional disorders, every one of 'em. No germ disease."

"Now this boy," I said, "*really* has something on his mind."

"Yes, I suppose he has."

But I didn't ask what. I could hear the discussion closing as if it had a spring latch on it.

We went into a door tucked between store-fronts and climbed three flights. Milton put out his hand to a bell-push and then

dropped it without ringing. There was a paper tacked to the door.

DOC I WENT FOR SHOTS
COME ON IN.

It was unsigned. Milton turned the knob and we went in.

The first thing that hit me was the smell. Not too strong, but not the kind of thing you ever forget if you ever had to dig a slit-trench through last week's burial pit. "That's the necrosis," muttered Milton. "Damn it." He gestured. "Hang your hat over there. Sit down. I'll be out soon." He went into an inner room, saying, "Hi, Hal," at the doorway. From inside came an answering rumble, and something twisted in my throat to hear it, for no voice which is that tired should sound that cheerful.

I sat watching the wallpaper and laboriously un-listening those clinical grunts and the gay-weary responses in the other room. The wallpaper was awful. I remember a night-club act where Reginald Gardiner used to give sound-effect renditions of wallpaper designs. This one, I decided, would run "Body to *weep* . . . yawp yawp; body to *weep* . . . yawp, yawp;" very faintly, with the final syllable a straining retch. I had just reached a particularly clumsy join where the paper utterly demolished its own rhythm and went "Yawp yawpbody to *weep*" when the outer door opened and I leaped

to my feet with the rush of utter guilt one feels when caught in an unlikely place with no curt and lucid explanation.

He was two long strides into the room, tall, and soft-footed, his face and long green eyes quite at rest, when he saw me. He stopped as if on leaf-springs and shock absorbers, not suddenly, completely controlled, and asked, "Who are you?"

"I'll be damned," I answered. "Kelley!"

He peered at me with precisely the expression I had seen so many times when he watched the little square windows on the one-arm bandits we used to play together. I could almost hear the tumblers, see the drums stop; not lemon . . . cherry . . . cherry . . . and *click!* this time but tankship . . . Texas . . . him! . . . and *click!* "I be goddam," he drawled, to indicate that he was even more surprised than I was. He transferred the small package he carried from his right hand to his left and shook hands. His hand went once and a half times around mine with enough left over to tie a half-hitch. "Where in time you been keepin' yourse'f? How'd you smoke me out?"

"I never," I said. (Saying it, I was aware that I always fell into the idiom of people who impressed me, to the exact degree of that impression. So I always found myself talking more like

Kelley than Kelley's shaving mirror.) I was grinning so wide my face hurt. "I'm glad to see you." I shook hands with him again, foolishly. "I came with the doctor."

"You a doctor now?" he said, his tone prepared for wonders.

"I'm a writer," I said deprecatingly.

"Yeah, I heard," he reminded himself. His eyes narrowed; as of old, it had the effect of sharp-focussing a searchlight beam. "I heard!" he repeated, with deeper interest. "Stories. Gremlins and flyin' saucers an' all like that." I nodded. He said, without insult, "Hell of a way to make a living."

"What about you?"

"Ships. Some drydock. Tank cleaning. Compass 'djustin'. For a while had a job holdin' a insurance inspector's head. You know."

I glanced at the big hands that could weld or steer or compute certainly with the excellence I used to know, and marvelled that he found himself so unremarkable. I pulled myself back to here-and-now and nodded toward the inner room. "I'm holding you up."

"No you ain't. Milton, he knows what he's doin'. He wants me, he'll holler."

"Who's sick?"

His face darkened like the sea in scud-weather, abruptly and deep down. "My brother." He looked at me searchingly. "He's . . ." Then he seemed to check himself. "He's sick," he said un-

necessarily, and added quickly, "He's going to be all right, though."

"Sure," I said quickly.

I had the feeling that we were both lying and that neither of us knew why.

Milton came out, laughing a laugh that cut off as soon as he was out of range of the sick man. Kelley turned to him slowly, as if slowness were the only alternative to leaping on the doctor, pounding the news out of him. "Hello, Kelley. Heard you come in."

"How is he, Doc?"

Milton looked up quickly, his bright round eyes clashing with Kelley's slitted fierce ones. "You got to take it easy, Kelley. What'll happen to him if you crack up?"

"Nobody's cracking up. What do you want me to do?"

Milton saw the package on the table. He picked it up and opened it. There was a leather case and two phials. "Ever use one of these before?"

"He was a pre-med before he went to sea," I said suddenly.

Milton stared at me. "You two know each other?"

I looked at Kelley. "Sometimes I think I invented him."

Kelley snorted and thumped my shoulder. Happily I had one hand on a built-in china shelf. His big hand continued the motion and took the hypodermic case from the doctor. "Sterilize the shaft and needle," he said sleepily, as if read-

ing. "Assemble without touching needle with fingers. To fill, puncture diaphragm and withdraw plunger. Squirt upward to remove air an' prevent embolism. Locate major vein in —"

Milton laughed. "Okay, okay. But forget the vein. Any place will do — it's subcutaneous, that's all. I've written the exact amounts to be used for exactly the symptoms you can expect. Don't jump the gun, Kelley. And remember how you salt your stew. Just because a little is good, it doesn't figure that a lot has to be better."

Kelley was wearing that sleepy inattention which, I remembered, meant only that he was taking in every single word like a tape recorder. He tossed the leather case gently, caught it. "Now?" he said.

"Not now," the doctor said positively. "Only when you have to."

Kelley seemed frustrated. I suddenly understood that he wanted to do something, build something, fight something. Anything but sit and wait for therapy to bring results. I said, "Kelley, any brother of yours is a — well, you know. I'd like to say hello, if it's all —"

Immediately and together Kelley and the doctor said loudly, "Sure, when he's on his feet," and "Better not just now, I've just given him a sedat —" And together they stopped awkwardly.

"Let's get that drink," I said

before they could flounder any more.

"Now you're talking. You too, Kelley. It'll do you good."

"Not me," said Kelley. "Hal —"

"I knocked him out," said the doctor bluntly. "You'll cluck around scratching for worms and looking for hawks till you wake him up, and he needs his sleep. Come on."

Painfully I had to add to my many mental images of Kelley the very first one in which he was indecisive. I hated it.

"Well," said Kelley, "let me go see."

He disappeared. I looked at Milton's face, and turned quickly away. I was sure he wouldn't want me to see that expression of sick pity and bafflement.

Kelley came out, moving silently as always. "Yeah, asleep," he said. "For how long?"

"I'd say four hours at least."

"Well all right." From the old-fashioned clothes-tree he took a battered black engineer's cap with a shiny, crazed patent-leather visor. I laughed. Both men turned to me, with annoyance, I thought.

On the landing outside I explained. "The hat," I said. "Remember? Tampico?"

"Oh," he grunted. He thwacked it against his forearm.

"He left it on the bar of this ginmill," I told Milton. "We got back to the gangplank and he missed it. Nothing would do but

he has to go back for it, so I went with him."

"You was wearin' a *tequila* label on your face," Kelley said. "Kept tryin' to tell the taximan you was a bottle."

"He didn't speak English."

Kelley flashed something like his old grin. "He got the idea."

"Anyway," I told Milton, "the place was closed when we got there. We tried the front door and the side doors and they were locked like Alcatraz. We made so much racket I guess if anyone was inside they were afraid to open up. We could see Kelley's hat in there on the bar. Nobody's *about* to steal that hat."

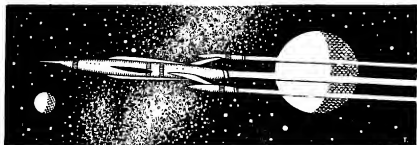
"It's a good hat," he said in an injured tone.

"Kelley goes into action," I said. "Kelley don't think like other people, you know, Milt. He squints through the window at the other wall, goes around the building, sets one foot against the corner stud, gets his fingers under the edge of that corrugated iron siding they use. 'I'll pry this out a bit,' he says. 'You slide in and get my hat.'"

"Corrugated was only nailed on one-by-twos," said Kelley.

"He gives one almighty pull," I chuckled, "and the whole damn side falls out of the building, I mean the second floor too. You never heard such a clap-o'-thunder in your life."

"I got my hat," said Kelley. He



uttered two syllables of a laugh. "Whole second floor was a you-know-what, an' the one single stairway come out with the wall."

"Taxi driver just took off. But he left his taxi. Kelley drove back. I couldn't. I was laughing."

"You was drunk."

"Well, *some*," I said.

We walked together, quietly, happily. Out of Kelley's sight, Milton thumped me gently on the ribs. It was eloquent and it pleased me. It said that it was a long time since Kelley had laughed. It was a long time since he had thought about anything but Hal.

I guess we felt it equally when, with no trace of humor . . . more, as if he had let my episode just blow itself out until he could be heard . . . Kelley said, "Doc, what's with the hand?"

"It'll be all right," Milton said.

"You put splints."

Milton sighed. "All right, all right. Three fractures. Two on the middle finger and one on the ring."

Kelley said, "I saw they was swollen."

I looked at Kelley's face and I

looked at Milton's, and I didn't like either, and I wished to God I were somewhere else, in a uranium mine maybe, or making out my income tax. I said, "Here we are. Ever been to Rudy's, Kelley?"

He looked up at the little yellow-and-red marquee. "No."

"Come on," I said. "*Tequila*."

We went in and got a booth. Kelley ordered beer. I got mad then and started to call him some things I'd picked up on waterfronts from here to Tierra de Fuego. Milton stared wall-eyed at me and Kelley stared at his hands. After a while Milton began to jot some of it down on a prescription pad he took from his pocket. I was pretty proud.

Kelley gradually got the idea. If I wanted to pick up the tab and he wouldn't let me, his habits were those of *uno puñeto sin cojones* (which a Spanish dictionary will reliably misinform you means "a weakling without eggs") and his affections for his forebears were powerful but irreverent. I won, and soon he was lapping up

a huge combination plate of beef *tostadas*, chicken *enchiladas*, and pork *tacos*. He endeared himself to Rudy by demanding salt and lemon with his *tequila* and despatching same with flawless ritual: hold the lemon between left thumb and forefinger, lick the back of the left hand, sprinkle salt on the wet spot, lift the *tequila* with the right, lick the salt, drink the *tequila*, bite the lemon. Soon he was imitating the German second mate we shipped out of Puerto Barrios one night, who ate fourteen green bananas and lost them and all his teeth over the side, in gummed gutturals which had us roaring.

But after that question about fractured fingers back there in the street, Milton and I weren't fooled any more, and though everyone tried hard and it was a fine try, none of the laughter went deep enough or stayed long enough, and I wanted to cry.

We all had a huge hunk of the nesselrode pie made by Rudy's beautiful blond wife — pie you can blow off your plate by flapping a napkin . . . sweet smoke with calories. And then Kelley demanded to know what time it was and cussed and stood up.

"It's only been two hours," Milton said.

"I just as soon head home all the same," said Kelley. "Thanks."

"Wait," I said. I got a scrap of paper out of my wallet and wrote on it. "Here's my phone. I want

to see you some more. I'm working for myself these days; my time's my own. I don't sleep much, so call me any time you feel like it."

He took the paper. "You're no good," he said. "You never were no good." The way he said it, I felt fine.

"On the corner is a newsstand," I told him. "There's a magazine there called *Amazing* with one of my lousy stories in it."

"They print it on a roll?" he demanded. He waved at us, nodded to Rudy, and went out.

I swept up some spilled sugar on the table top and pushed it around until it was a perfect square. After a while I shoved in the sides until it was a lozenge. Milton didn't say anything either. Rudy, as is his way, had sense enough to stay away from us.

"Well, that did him some good," Milton said after a while.

"You know better than that," I said bitterly.

Milton said patiently, "Kelley thinks *we* think it did him some good. And thinking that does him good."

I had to smile at that contortion, and after that it was easier to talk. "The kid going to live?"

Milton waited, as if another answer might spring from somewhere, but it didn't. He said, "No."

"Fine doctor."

"Don't!" he snapped. He looked

up at me. "Look, if this was one of those — well, say pleurisy cases on the critical list, without the will to live, why I'd know what to do. Usually those depressed cases have such a violent desire to be reassured, down deep, that you can snap 'em right out of it if only you can think of the right thing to say. And you usually can. But Hal's not one of those. He wants to live. If he didn't want so much to live he'd've been dead three weeks ago. What's killing him is sheer somatic trauma — one broken bone after another, one failing or inflamed internal organ after another."

"Who's doing it?"

"Damn it, *nobody's* doing it!" He caught me biting my lip. "If either one of us should say Kelley's doing it, the other one will punch him in the mouth. Right?"

"Right."

"Just so that doesn't have to happen," said Milton carefully, "I'll tell you what you're bound to ask me in a minute: why isn't he in a hospital?"

"Okay, why?"

"He was. For weeks. And all the time he was there these things kept on happening to him, only worse. More, and more often. I got him home as soon as it was safe to get him out of traction for that broken thigh. He's much better off with Kelley. Kelley keeps him cheered up, cooks for him, medi-

cates him — the works. It's all Kelley does these days."

"I figured: It must be getting pretty tough."

"It is. I wish I had your ability with invective. You can't lend that man anything, give him anything . . . proud? God!"

"Don't take this personally, but have you had consultation?"

He shrugged. "Six ways from the middle. And nine-tenths of it behind Kelley's back, which isn't easy. The lies I've told him! Hal's just *got* to have a special kind of Persian melon that someone is receiving in a little store in Yonkers. Out Kelley goes, and in the meantime I have to corral two or three doctors and whip 'em in to see Hal and out again before Kelley gets back. Or Hal has to have a special prescription, and I fix up with the druggist to take a good two hours compounding it. Hal saw Grundage, the osteo man, that way, but poor old Ancelowicz the pharmacist got punched in the chops for the delay."

"Milton, you're all right."

He snarled at me, and then went on quietly, "None of it's done any good. I've learned a whole encyclopedia full of wise words and some therapeutic tricks I didn't know existed. But . . ." He shook his head. "Do you know why Kelley and I wouldn't let you meet Hal?" He wet his lips and cast about for an example. "Remember the pictures of Musso-

lini's corpse after the mob got through with it?"

I shuddered. "I saw 'em."

"Well, that's what he looks like, only he's alive, which doesn't make it any prettier. Hal doesn't know how bad it is, and neither Kelley nor I would run the risk of having him see it reflected in someone else's face. I wouldn't send a wooden Indian into that room."

I began to pound the table, barely touching it, hitting it harder and harder until Milton caught my wrist. I froze then, unhappily conscious of the eyes of everyone on the place looking at me. Gradually the normal sound of the restaurant resumed. "Sorry."

"It's all right."

"There's got to be some sort of reason!"

His lips twitched in a small acid smile. "That's what you get down to at last, isn't it? There's always been a reason for everything, and if we don't know it, we can find it out. But just one single example of real unreason is enough to shake our belief in everything. And then the fear gets bigger than the case at hand and extends to a whole universe of concepts labelled 'unproven'. Shows you how little we believe in anything, basically."

"That's a miserable piece of philosophy!"

"Sure. If you have another arrival point for a case like this, I'll buy it with a bonus. Meantime

I'll just go on worrying at this one and feeling more scared than I ought to."

"Let's get drunk."

"A wonderful idea."

Neither of us ordered. We just sat there looking at the lozenge of sugar I'd made on the tabletop. After a while I said, "Hasn't Kelley any idea of what's wrong?"

"You know Kelley. If he had an idea he'd be working on it. All he's doing is sitting by watching his brother's body stew and swell like yeast in a vat."

"What about Hal?"

"He isn't lucid much any more. Not if I can help it."

"But maybe he —"

"Look," said Milton, "I don't want to sound cranky or anything, but I can't hold still for a lot of questions like . . ." He stopped, took out his display handkerchief, looked at it, put it away. "I'm sorry. You don't seem to understand that I didn't take this case yesterday afternoon. I've been sweating it out for nearly three months now. I've already thought of everything you're going to think of. Yes, I questioned Hal, back and forth and sideways. Nothing. N-n-nothing."

That last word trailed off in such a peculiar way that I looked up abruptly. "Tell me," I demanded.

"Tell you what?" Suddenly he looked at his watch. I covered it with my hand. "Come on, Milt."

"I don't know what you're — damn it, leave me alone, will you? If it was anything important, I'd've chased it down long ago."

"Tell me the unimportant something."

"No."

"Tell me why you won't tell me."

"Damn you, I'll do that. It's because you're a crackpot. You're a nice guy and I like you, but you're a crackpot." He laughed suddenly, and it hit me like the flare of a flashbulb. "I didn't know you could look so astonished!" he said. "Now take it easy and listen to me. A guy comes out of a steak house and steps on a rusty nail, and ups and dies of tetanus. But your crackpot vegetarian will swear up and down that the man would still be alive if he hadn't poisoned his system with meat, and use the death to prove his point. The perennial Dry will call the same casualty a victim of John Barleycorn if he knows the man had a beer with his steak. This one death can be ardently and wholeheartedly be blamed on the man's divorce, his religion, his political affiliations or on a hereditary taint from his great-great-grandfather who worked for Oliver Cromwell. You're a nice guy and I like you," he said again, "and I am not going to sit across from you and watch you do the crackpot act."

"I do not know," I said slowly and distinctly, "what the hell you are talking about. And now you *have* to tell me."

"I suppose so," he said sadly. He drew a deep breath. "You believe what you write. No," he said quickly, "I'm not asking you, I'm telling you. You grind out all this fantasy and horror stuff and you believe every word of it. More basically, you'd rather believe in the outré and the so-called 'unknowable' than in what I'd call *real* things. You think I'm talking through my hat."

"I do," I said, "but go ahead."

"If I called you up tomorrow and told you with great joy that they'd isolated a virus for Hal's condition and a serum was on the way, you'd be just as happy about it as I would be, but way down deep you'd wonder if that was what was really wrong with him, or if the serum is what really cured him. If on the other hand I admitted to you that I'd found two small punctures on Hal's throat and a wisp of fog slipping out of the room — by God! see what I mean? You have a gleam in your eye already!"

I covered my eyes. "Don't let me stop you now," I said coldly. "Since you are not going to admit Dracula's punctures, what are you going to admit?"

"A year ago Kelley gave his brother a present. An ugly little brute of a Haitian doll. Hal kept

it around to make faces at for a while and then gave it to a girl. He had bad trouble with the girl. She hates him — really hates him. As far as anyone knows she still has the doll. Are you happy now?"

"Happy," I said disgustedly. "But Milt — you're not just ignoring this doll thing. Why, that could easily be the whole basis of . . . hey, sit down! Where are you going?"

"I told you I wouldn't sit across from a damn lobbyist. Enter hobbies, exit reason." He recoiled. "Wait — *you* sit down now."

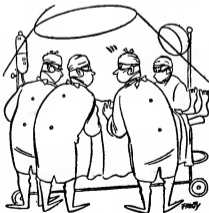
I gathered up a handful of his well-cut lapels. "We'll both sit down," I said gently, "or I'll prove to your heart's desire that I've reached the end of reason."

"Yessir," he said good-naturedly, and sat down. I felt like a damn fool. The twinkle left his eyes and he leaned forward. "Perhaps now you'll listen instead of riding off like that. I suppose you know that in many cases the voodoo doll does work, and you know why?"

"Well, yes. I didn't think you'd admit it." I got no response from his stony gaze, and at last realized that a fantasist's pose of authority on such matters is bound to sit ill with a serious and progressive physician. A lot less positively, I said, "It comes down to a matter of subjective reality, or what some people call faith. If you believe firmly that the mutilation of a doll with which you identify your-

self will result in your own mutilation, well, that's what will happen."

"That, and a lot of things even a horror-story writer could find out if he researched anywhere except in his projective imagination. For example, there are Arabs in North Africa today whom you dare not insult in any way really important to them. If they feel injured, they'll threaten to die, and if you call the bluff they'll sit down, cover their heads, and damn well *die*. There are psychosomatic phenomena like the stigmata, or wounds of the cross, which appear from time to time on the hands, feet and breasts of exceptionally devout people. I know you know a lot of this," he added abruptly, apparently reading something in my expression, "but I'm not going to get my knee off your chest



"Scalpel — sponge — band-aid —"

until you'll admit that I'm at least capable of taking a thing like this into consideration and tracking it down."

"I never saw you before in my life," I said, and in an important way I meant it.

"Good," he said, with considerable relief. "Now I'll tell you what I did. I jumped at this doll episode almost as wildly as you did. It came late in the questioning because apparently it *really didn't matter* to Hal."

"Oh, well, but the subconscious —"

"Shaddup!" He stuck a surprisingly sharp forefinger into my collarbone. "I'm telling you; you're not telling me. I won't disallow that a deep belief in voodoo might be hidden in Hal's subconscious, but if it is, it's where sodium amytal and word association and light and profound hypnosis and a half-dozen other therapies give not a smidgin of evidence. I'll take that as proof that he carries no such conviction. I guess from the looks of you I'll have to remind you again that I've dug into this thing in more ways for longer and with more tools than you have — and I doubt that it means any less to me than it does to you."

"You know, I'm just going to shut up," I said plaintively.

"High time," he said, and grinned. "Now, in every case of voodoo damage or death, there

has to be that element of devout belief in the powers of the witch or wizard, and through it a complete sense of identification with the doll. In addition, it helps if the victim knows what sort of damage the doll is sustaining — crushing, or pins sticking into it, or what. And you can take my word for it that no such news has reached Hal."

"What about the doll? Just to be absolutely sure, shouldn't we get it back?"

"I thought of that. But there's no way I know of of getting it back without making it look valuable to the woman. And if she thinks it's valuable to Hal, we'll *never* see it."

"Hm. Who is she, and what's her royal gripe?"

"She's as nasty a piece of fluff as they come. She got involved with Hal for a little while — nothing serious, certainly not on his part. He was . . . he's a big good-natured kid who thinks the only evil people around are the ones who get killed at the end of the movie. Kelley was at sea at the time and he blew in to find this little vampire taking Hal for everything she could, first by sympathy, then by threats. The old badger game. Hal was just bewildered. Kelley got his word that nothing had occurred between them, and then forced Hal to lower the boom. She called his bluff and it went to court. They

forced a physical examination on her and she got laughed out of court. She wasn't the mother of anyone's unborn child, She never will be. She swore to get even with him. She's without brains or education or resources, but that doesn't stop her from being pathological. She sure can hate."

"Oh. You've seen her."

Milton shuddered. "I've seen her. I tried to get all Hal's gifts back from her. I had to say all because I didn't dare itemize. All I wanted, it might surprise you to know, was that damned doll. Just in case, you know . . . although I'm morally convinced that the thing has nothing to do with it. Now do you see what I mean about a single example of unreason?"

"Fraid I do." I felt upset and sat upon and I wasn't fond of the feeling. I've read just too many stories where the scientist just hasn't the imagination to solve a haunt. It had been great, feeling-superior to a bright guy like Milton.

We walked out of there and for the first time I felt the mood of a night without feeling that an author was ramming it down my throat for story purposes. I looked at the clean-swept, star-reaching cubism of the Radio City area and its living snakes of neon, and I suddenly thought of an Evelyn Smith story the general idea of which was "After they found out

the atom bomb was magic, the rest of the magicians who enchanted refrigerators and washing machines and the telephone system came out into the open." I felt a breath of wind and wondered what it was that had breathed. I heard the snoring of the city and for an awesome second felt it would roll over, open its eyes, and . . . *speak*.

On the corner I said to Milton, "Thanks. You've given me a thumping around. I guess I needed it." I looked at him. "By the Lord I'd like to find some place where you've been stupid in this thing."

"I'd be happy if you could," he said seriously.

I whacked him on the shoulder. "See? You take all the fun out of it."

He got a cab and I started to walk. I walked a whole lot that night, just anywhere. I thought about a lot of things. When I got home the phone was ringing. It was Kelley.

I'm not going to give you a blow-by-blow of that talk with Kelley. It was in that small front room of his place — an apartment he'd rented after Hal got sick, and not the one Hal used to have — and we talked the night away. All I'm withholding is Kelley's expression of things you already know: that he was deeply attached to his brother, that he had no hope left for him, that he

would find who or what was responsible and deal with it his way. It is a strong man's right to break down if he must, with whom and where he chooses, and such an occasion is only an expression of strength. But when it happens in a quiet place, with the command of hope strongly in the air; when a chest heaves and a throat must be held wide open to sob silently so that the dying one shall not know; these things are not pleasant to describe in detail. Whatever my ultimate feelings for Kelley, his emotions and the expressions of them are for him to keep.

He did, however, know the name of the girl and where she was. He did not hold her responsible. I thought he might have a suspicion, but it turned out to be only a certainty that this was no disease, no subjective internal disorder. If a great hate and a great determination could solve the problem, Kelley would solve it. If research and logic could solve it, Milton would do it. If I could do it, I would.

She was checking hats in a sleazy club out where Brooklyn and Queens, in a remote meeting, agree to be known as Long Island. The contact was easy to make. I gave her my spring coat with the label outward. It's a good label. When she turned away with it I called her back and drunkenly asked her for the bill in the right-

hand pocket. She found it and handed it to me. It was a hundred. "Damn taxis never got change," I mumbled and took it before her astonishment turned to sleight-of-hand. I got out my wallet, crowded the crumpled note into it clumsily enough to display the two other C-notes there, shoved it into the front of my jacket so that it missed the pocket and fell to the floor, and walked off. I walked back before she could lift the hinged counter and skin out after it. I picked it up and smiled foolishly at her. "Lose more business cards that way," I said. Then I brought her into focus. "Hey, you know, you're cute."

I suppose "cute" is one of the four-letter words that describe her. "What's your name?"

"Charity," she said. "But don't get ideas." She was wearing so much pancake makeup that I couldn't tell what her complexion was. She leaned so far over the counter that I could see lipstick stains on her brassiere.

"I don't have a favorite charity yet," I said. "You work here all a time?"

"I go home once in a while," she said.

"What time?"

"One o'clock."

"Tell you what," I confided. "Let's both be in front of this place at a quarter after and see who stands who up, okay?" Without waiting for an answer I stuck

the wallet into my back pocket so that my jacket hung on it. All the way into the dining room I could feel her eyes on it like two hot glistening broiled mushrooms. I came within an ace of losing it to the head waiter when he collided with me, too.

She was there all right, with a yellowish fur around her neck and heels you could have driven into a pine plank. She was up to the elbows in jangly brass and chrome, and when we got into a cab she threw herself on me with her mouth open. I don't know where I got the reflexes, but I threw my head down and cracked her in the cheekbone with my forehead, and when she squeaked indignantly I said I'd dropped the wallet again and she went about helping me find it quietly as you please. We went to a place and another place and an after-hours place, all her choice. They served her sherry in her whiskey-ponies and doubled all my orders, and tilted the checks something outrageous. Once I tipped a waiter eight dollars and she palmed the five. Once she wormed my leather notebook out of my breast pocket thinking it was the wallet, which by this time was safely tucked away in my knit shorts. She did get one enamel cuff link with a rhinestone in it, and my fountain pen. All in all it was quite a duel. I was loaded to the eyeballs with thiamin hydrochloride and caffeine

citrate, but a most respectable amount of alcohol soaked through them, and it was all I could do to play it through. I made it, though, and blocked her at every turn until she had no further choice but to take me home. She was furious and made only the barest attempts to hide it.

We got each other up the dim dawnlit stairs, shushing each other drunkenly, both much soberer than we acted, each promising what we expected not to deliver. She negotiated her lock successfully and waved me inside.

I hadn't expected it to be so neat. Or so cold. "I didn't leave that window open," she said complainingly. She crossed the room and closed it. She pulled her fur around her throat. "This is awful."

It was a long low room with three windows. At one end, covered by a venetian blind, was a kitchenette. A door at one side of it was probably a bathroom.

She went to the Venetian blind and raised it. "Have it warmed up in a jiffy," she said.

I looked at the kitchenette. "Hey," I said as she lit the little oven, "Coffee. How's about coffee?"

"Oh, all right," she said glumly. "But talk quiet, huh?"

"Sh-h-h-h." I pushed my lips around with a forefinger. I circled the room. Cheap phonograph and records. Small-screen TV. A big

double studio-couch. A bookcase with no books in it, just china dogs. It occurred to me that her unsubtle approach was probably not successful as often as she might wish.

But where was the thing I was looking for?

"Hey, I wanna powder my noses," I announced.

"In there," she said. "Can't you talk quiet?"

I went into the bathroom. It was tiny. There was a foreshortened tub with a circular frame over it from which hung a horribly cheerful shower curtain, with big red roses. I closed the door behind me and carefully opened the medicine chest. Just the usual. I closed it carefully so it wouldn't click. A built-in shelf held towels.

Must be a closet in the main room, I thought. Hatbox, trunk, suitcase, maybe. Where would I put a devil-doll if I were hexing someone?

I wouldn't hide it away, I answered myself. I don't know why, but I'd sort of have it out in the open somehow . . .

I opened the shower curtain and let it close. Round curtain, square tub.

"Yup!"

I pushed the whole round curtain back, and there in the corner, just at eye level, was a triangular shelf. Grouped on it were four figurines, made apparently from kneaded wax. Three had wisps of

hair fastened by candle-droppings. The fourth was hairless, but had slivers of a horny substance pressed into the ends of the arms. Fingernail parings.

I stood for a moment thinking. Then I picked up the hairless doll, turned to the door. I checked myself, flushed the toilet, took a towel, shook it out, dropped it over the edge of the tub. Then I reeled out. "Hey honey, look what I got, ain't it *cute*?"

"Shh!" she said. "Oh for crying out loud. Put that back, will you?"

"Well, what is it?"

"It's none of your business, that's what it is. Come on, put it back."

I wagged my finger at her. "You're not being nice to me," I complained.

She pulled some shreds of patience together with an obvious effort. "It's just some sort of toys I have around. Here."

I snatched it away. "All right, you don't wanna be nice!" I whipped my coat together and began to button it clumsily, still holding the figurine.

She sighed, rolled her eyes, and came to me. "Come on, Dadsy. Have a nice cup of coffee and let's not fight." She reached for the doll and I snatched it away again.

"You got to tell me," I pouted.

"It's pers'nal."

"I wanna be personal," I pointed out.

"Oh all right," she said. "I had

a roommate one time, she used to make these things. She said you make one, and s'pose I decide I don't like you, I get something of yours, hair or toenails or something. Say your name is George. What is your name?"

"George," I said.

"All right, I call the doll George. Then I stick pins in it. That's all. Give it to me?"

"Who's this one?"

"That's Al."

"Hal?"

"Al. I got one called Hal. He's in there. I hate him the most."

"Yeah, huh. Well, what happens to Al and George and all when you stick pins in 'em?"

"They're s'posed to get sick. Even die."

"Do they?"

"Nah," she said with immediate and complete candor. "I told you, it's just a game, sort of. If it worked believe me old Al would bleed to death. He runs the delicatessen." I handed her the doll, and she looked at it pensively. "I wish it did work, sometimes. Sometimes I almost believe in it. I stick 'em and they just *yell*."

"Introduce me," I demanded.

"What?"

"Introduce me," I said. I pulled her toward the bathroom. She made a small irritated "oh-h," and came along.

"This is Fritz and this is Bruno and — where's the other one?"

"What other one?"

"Maybe he fell behind the — Down back of —" She knelt on the edge of the tub and leaned over to the wall, to peer behind it. She regained her feet, her face red from effort and anger. "What are you trying to pull? You kidding around or something?"

I spread my arms. "What do you mean?"

"Come on," she said between her teeth. She felt my coat, my jacket. "You hid it some place."

"No I didn't. There was only four." I pointed. "Al and Fritz and Bruno and Hal. Which one's Hal?"

"That's Freddie. He give me twenny bucks and took twenny three out of my purse, the dirty —. But Hal's gone. He was the best one of all. You *sure* you didn't hide him?"

"The window!" she said, and ran into the other room. I was on my four bones peering under the tub when I understood what she meant. I took a last good look around and then followed her. She was standing at the window, shading her eyes and peering out. "What do you know? Imagine somebody would swipe a thing like that!"

A sick sense of loss was born in my solar plexus.

"Aw, forget it. I'll make another one for that Hal. But I'll never make another one that ugly," she added wistfully. "Come on, the coffee's — what's the mat-

ter? You sick? You look bad, Hal."

"Yeah," I said, "I'm sick."

"Of all the things to steal," she said from the kitchenette. "Who do you suppose would do such a thing?"

Suddenly I knew who would. I cracked my fist into my palm and laughed.

"What's the matter, you crazy?"

"Yes," I said. "You got a phone?"

"No. Where you going?"

"Out. Goodbye, Charity."

"Hey, now wait, honey. Just when I got coffee for you."

I snatched the door open. She caught my sleeve. "You can't go away like this. How's about a little something for Charity?"

"You'll get yours when you make the rounds tomorrow, if you don't have a hangover from those sherry highballs," I said cheerfully. "And don't forget the five you swiped from the tip-plate. Better watch out for that waiter, by the way. I think he saw you do it."

"You're not drunk!" she gasped.

"You're not a witch," I grinned. I blew her a kiss and ran out.

I shall always remember her like that, round-eyed, a little more astonished than she was resentful, the beloved dollar-signs fading from her hot brown eyes, the pathetic, useless little twitch of her hips she summoned up as a last plea.

Ever try to find a phone booth at five a.m.? I half-trotted nine blocks before I found a cab, and I was on the Queens side of the Triboro Bridge before I found a gas station open.

I dialed. The phone said, "Hello?"

"Kelley!" I roared happily. "Why didn't you tell me? You'd'a saved me sixty bucks worth of the most dismal fun I ever —"

"This is Milton," said the telephone. "Hal just died."

My mouth was still open and I guess it just stayed that way. Anyway it was cold inside when I closed it. "I'll be right over."

"Better not," said Milton. His voice was shaking with incomplete control. "Unless you really want to . . . there's nothing you can do, and I'm going to be . . . busy."

"Where's Kelley?" I whispered.

"I don't know."

"Well," I said. "Call me."

I got back into my taxi and went home. I don't remember the trip.

Sometimes I think I dreamed I saw Kelly that morning.

A lot of alcohol and enough emotion to kill it, mixed with no sleep for thirty hours, makes for blackout. I came up out of it reluctantly, feeling that this was no kind of world to be aware of. Not today.

I lay looking at the bookcase.

It was very quiet. I closed my eyes, turned over, burrowed into the pillow, opened my eyes again and saw Kelley sitting in the easy chair, poured out in his relaxed feline fashion, legs too long, arms too long, eyes too long and only partly open.

I didn't ask him how he got in because he was already in, and welcome. I didn't say anything because I didn't want to be the one to tell him about Hal. And besides I wasn't awake yet. I just lay there.

"Milton told me," he said. "It's all right."

I nodded.

Kelley said, "I read your story. I found some more and read them too. You got a lot of imagination."

He hung a cigarette on his lower lip and lit it. "Milton, he's got a lot of knowledge. Now, both of you think real good up to a point. Then too much knowledge presses him off to the no'theast. And too much imagination squeezes you off to the no'thwest."

He smoked a while.

"Me, I think straight through but it takes me a while."

I palmed my eyeballs. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"That's okay," he said quietly. "Look, I'm goin' after what killed Hal."

I closed my eyes and saw a vicious, pretty, empty little face. I said, "I was most of the night with Charity."

"Were you now?"

"Kelley," I said, "If it's her you're after, forget it. She's a sleazy little tramp but she's also a little kid who never had a chance. She didn't kill Hal."

"I know she didn't. I don't feel about her one way or the other. I know what killed Hal, though, and I'm goin' after it the only way I know for sure."

"All right then," I said. I let my head dig back into the pillow. "What did kill him?"

"Milton told you about that doll Hal give her."

"He told me. There's nothing in that, Kelley. For a man to be a voodoo victim, he's got to believe that —"

"Yeh, yeh, yeh. Milt told me. For hours he told me."

"Well, all right."

"You got imagination," Kelley said sleepily. "Now just imagine along with me a while. Milt tell you how some folks, if you point a gun at 'em and go bang, they drop dead, even if there was only blanks in the gun?"

"He didn't, but I read it somewhere. Same general idea."

"Now imagine all the shootings you ever heard of was like that, with blanks."

"Go ahead."

"You got a lot of evidence, a lot of experts, to prove about this believing business, ever' time any-one gets shot."

"Got it."

"Now imagine somebody shows up with live ammunition in his gun. Do you think those bullets going to give a damn who believes what?"

I didn't say anything.

"For a long time people been makin' dolls and stickin' pins in 'em. Wherever somebody believes it can happen, they get it. Now suppose somebody shows up with the doll all those dolls was copied from. The real one."

I lay still.

"You don't have to know nothin' about it," said Kelley lazily. "You don't have to be anybody special. You don't have to understand how it works. Nobody has to believe nothing. All you do, you just point it where you want it to work."

"Point it how?" I whispered.

He shrugged. "Call the doll by a name. Hate it, maybe."

"For God's sake's, Kelley, you're crazy! Why, there can't be anything like that!"

"You eat a steak," Kelley said, "How your gut know what to take and what to pass? Do *you* know?"

"Some people know."

"You don't. But your gut does. So there's lots of natural laws that are goin' to work whether anyone understands 'em or not. Lots of sailors take a trick at the wheel without knowin' how a steering engine works. Well, that's me. I know where I'm goin' and I know I'll get there. What do I care how

does it work, or who believes what?"

"Fine, so what are you going to do?"

"Get what got Hal." His tone was just as lazy but his voice was very deep, and I knew when not to ask any more questions. Instead I said, with a certain amount of annoyance, "Why tell me?"

"Want you to do something for me."

"What?"

"Don't tell no one what I just said for a while. And keep something for me."

"What? And for how long?"

"You'll know."

I'd have risen up and roared at him if he had not chosen just that second to get up and drift out of the bedroom. "What gets me," he said quietly from the other room, "is I could have figured this out six months ago."

I fell asleep straining to hear him go out. He moves quieter than any big man I ever saw.

It was afternoon when I awoke. The doll was sitting on the mantelpiece glaring at me. Ugliest thing ever happened.

I saw Kelley at Hal's funeral. He and Milt and I had a somber drink afterward. We didn't talk about dolls. Far as I know Kelley shipped out right afterward. You assume that seamen do, when they drop out of sight. Milton was as busy as a doctor, which is very.

I left the doll where it was for a week or two, wondering when Kelley was going to get around to his project. He'd probably call for it when he was ready. Meanwhile I respected his request and told no one about it. One day when some people were coming over I shoved it in the top shelf of the closet, and somehow it just got left there.

About a month afterward I began to notice the smell. I couldn't identify it right away; it was too faint; but whatever it was, I didn't like it. I traced it to the closet, and then to the doll. I took it down and sniffed it. My breath exploded out. It was that same smell a lot of people wish they could forget — what Milton called necrotic flesh. I came within an inch of pitching the filthy thing down the incinerator, but a promise is a promise. I put it down on the table, where it slumped repulsively. One of the legs was broken above the knee. I mean it seemed to have two knee joints. And it was somehow puffy, sick-looking.

I had an old bell-jar somewhere that once had a clock in it. I found it and a piece of inlaid linoleum, and put the doll under the jar so I could at least live with it.

I worked and saw people — dinner with Milton, once — and the days went by the way they do, and then one night it occurred to me to look at the doll again.

It was in pretty sorry shape. I'd tried to keep it fairly cool, but it seemed to be melting and running all over. For a moment I worried about what Kelley might say, and then I heartily damned Kelley and put the whole mess down in the cellar.

And I guess it was altogether two months after Hal's death that I wondered why I'd assumed Kelley would have to call for the little horror before he did what he had to do. He said he was going to get what got Hal, and he intimated that the doll was that something.

Well, that doll was being got, but good. I brought it up and put it under the light. It was still a figurine, but it was one unholy mess. "Attaboy, Kelley," I gloated. "Go get 'em, kid."

Milton called me up and asked me to meet him at Rudy's. He sounded pretty bad. We had the shortest drink yet.

He was sitting in the back booth chewing on the insides of his cheeks. His lips were gray and he slopped his drink.

"What in time happened to you?" I gasped.

He gave me a ghastly smile. "I'm famous," he said. I heard his glass chatter against his teeth. He said, "I called in so many consultants on Hal Kelley that I'm supposed to be an expert on that — on that . . . condition." He

forced his glass back to the table with both hands and held it down. He tried to smile and I wished he wouldn't. He stopped trying and almost whimpered, "I can't nurse one of 'em like that again."

"You going to tell me what happened?" I asked harshly. That works sometimes.

"Oh, oh yes. Well they brought in a . . . another one. At General. They called me in. Just like Hal. I mean *exactly* like Hal. Only I won't have to nurse this one, no I won't, I won't have to. She died six hours after she arrived."

"*She?*"

"She just said the same thing over and over every time anyone talked to her. They'd say, 'What happened?' or 'Who did this to you?' or 'What's your name?' and she'd say 'He called me Dolly'. That's all she'd say, just 'He called me Dolly.'"

I got up. "'Bye, Milt."

He looked stricken. "Don't go, will you, you just got —"

"I got to go," I said. I didn't look back. I had to get out and

ask myself some questions. Think.

Who's guilty of murder, I asked myself, the one who pulls the trigger, or the gun?

I thought of a poor damn pretty empty little face with greedy hot brown eyes, and what Kelley said, "I don't care about her."

I thought, when she was twisting and breaking and sticking, how did it look to the doll? Bet she never even wondered about that.

I thought, action: A girl throws a fan at a man. Reaction: The man throws the girl at the fan. Action: A wheel sticks on a shaft. Reaction: Knock the shaft out of the wheel. Situation: We can't get inside. Resolution: Take the outside off it.

How do you kill a doll?

Who's guilty, the one who pulls the trigger, or the gun?

"*He called me Dolly.*"

When I got home the phone was ringing.

"Hi," said Kelley.

I said, "It's all gone. The doll's all gone."

"All right," said Kelley.



The PIN

BY ROBERT BLOCH

From the creator of Psycho and "Yours Truly, Jack the Ripper"—another tale of the macabre—of destiny in the form of a strange little man wielding a strange little pin!

SOMEHOW, somewhere, someone would find out. It was inevitable. In this case, the *someone* was named Barton Stone. The *somewhere* was an old loft over a condemned office building on Blecker Street.

And the *somehow*—

Barton Stone came there early one Monday morning as the sun shone yellow and cold over the huddled rooftops. He noted the mass of the surrounding buildings, rearranged them into a more pleasing series of linear units, gauged his perspective, evaluated the tones and shadings of sunlight and shadow with his artist's eye. There was a picture here, he told himself, if only he could find it.

Unfortunately, he wasn't looking for a picture. He had plenty of subjects in mind; right now, he was looking for a place in which to paint. He wanted a studio, wanted it quickly. And it must





be cheap. Running water and north light were luxuries beyond his present consideration. As for other aesthetic elements, such as cleanliness — Stone shrugged as he mounted the stairs, his long fingers trailing dust from the rickety railing.

There was dust everywhere, for this was the domain of dust, of darkness and desertion. He stumbled upwards into the silence.

The first two floors of the building were entirely empty, just as Freed had told him. And the stairs to the loft were at the end of the hall on the second floor.

"You'll have it all to yourself," the rental agent had promised. "But remember to stay in the loft. Nobody'd ever bother looking up there. Damned inspectors come around, they keep telling us to raze the building. But the floor's safe enough. All you got to do is keep out of sight — why, you could hide out there for years without being caught. It's no palace, but take a look and see what you think. For twenty bucks a month, you can't go wrong."

Stone nodded now as he walked down the debris-littered hall towards the loft stairs. He couldn't go wrong. He sensed, suddenly and with utter certainty, that this was the place he'd been searching for during all of these frustratingly futile weeks. He moved up the stairs with inevitable —

Then he heard the sound.

Call it a thud, call it a thump, call it a muffled crash. The important thing was that it sounded from above, from the deserted loft.

Stone paused on the second step from the top. There was someone in the loft. *For twenty bucks a month you can't go wrong — but you could hide out there for years without being caught.*

Barton Stone was not a brave man. He was only a poor artist, looking for a cheap loft or attic to use as a studio. But his need was great; great enough to impel him upwards, carry him to the top of the loft stairs and down the short corridor leading to the entry.

He moved quietly, now, although there was thunder in his chest. He tiptoed delicately towards the final door, noted the overhead transom; noted, too, the small crate in the corner against the wall.

There was silence beyond the door, and silence in the hall now as he carefully lifted the crate and placed it so that he could mount the flat top and peer over the open transom.

No sense being melodramatic, he told himself. On the other hand, there was no sense rushing in — Barton Stone was not a fool and he didn't want to become an angel.

He looked over the transom.

The loft was huge. A dusty sky-

light dominated the ceiling, and enough light filtered through to bathe the room in sickly lumiance. Stone could see everything, everything.

He saw the books, stacked man-high; row after row of thick books. He saw the sheafs bulked between the books; pile after pile of sheafs. He saw the papers rising in solid walls from the floor. He saw the table in the center of the loft — the table, bulwarked on three sides by books and sheafs and papers all tossed together in toppling towers.

And he saw the man.

The man sat behind the table, back to the wall, surrounded on three sides by the incredible array of printed matter. He sat there, head down, and peered at the pages of an opened book. He never looked up, never made a sound, just sat there and stared.

Stone stared back. He understood the source of the noise, now; one of the books had fallen from its stack. But nothing else made sense to him. His eyes sought clues, his mind sought meaning.

The man was short, fat, middle-aged. His hair was graying into white, his face lining into wrinkles. He wore a dirty khaki shirt and trousers and he might have been an ex-GI, a tramp, a fugitive from justice, an indigent book-dealer, an eccentric millionaire.

Stone moved from the realm of might-have-been to a considera-

tion of what he actually saw. The little fat man was riffling through the pages of a fat, paper-bound book which could easily be mistaken for a telephone directory. He turned the pages, apparently at random, with his left hand. Very well, then; he was left-handed.

Or was he? His right hand moved across the table, raised and poised so that the sunlight glittered in a thin line of silver against the object he held.

It was a pin; a long, silver pin. Stone stared at it. The man was staring at it too. Stone's gaze held curiosity. The little fat man's gaze held utter loathing and, more than that, a sort of horrified fascination.

Another sound broke the stillness. The little man sighed. It was a deep sigh that became, with abrupt and hideous clarity, a groan.

Eyes still intent on the pin, the little man brought it down suddenly upon the opened pages of his book. He stabbed at random, driving the point home. Then he hurled the book to the floor, sat back, buried his face in his hands, and his shoulders shook with a silent sobbing.

A second sped. Stone blinked. And beyond the door, in the loft, the little man straightened up, reached for a long sheet of paper that might have been a polling-list, and scanned its surface. The

pin poised itself over the center of the sheet. Again the sigh, the stab, the sob.

Now the little man rose, and for a frantic moment, Stone wondered if he'd been detected. But no, the pin-wielder merely wandered down the row of books and pulled out another thick volume. He carried it back to the table and sat down, picking up the pin with his right hand as his left turned page after page. He scanned, scrutinized, then sighed, stabbed, sobbed.

Barton Stone descended from the top of the crate, replaced it carefully in the corner, and tiptoed down the stairs. He moved carefully and silently, and it was an effort to do so, because he wanted all the while to run.

His feeling was irrational, and he knew it, but he could not control himself. He had always experienced that sudden surge of fear in the presence of the demented. When he saw a drunk in a bar, he was afraid — because you never know what a drunk will do next, what will enter his mind and how he will act. He shied away from arguments, because of what happens to a man's reaction-pattern when he sees red. He avoided the mumblers, the people who talk to themselves or to the empty air as they shuffle down the street.

Right now he was afraid of a little fat man, a little fat man with a long, sharp, silver needle.

The needle was crooked at one end, Stone remembered — and he could see that needle sinking into his own throat, right up to the crooked angle. The fat man was crazy and Stone wanted no part of him. He'd go back to the rental agency, see Mr. Freed, tell him. Freed could evict him, get him out of there in a hurry. That would be the sensible way.

Before he knew it, Stone was back in his own walkup flat, resting on the bed and staring at the wall. Although it wasn't the wall he was seeing. He was seeing the little fat man and studying him as he sat at his big table. He was seeing the books and the sheafs and the long rolls and scrolls of paper.

He could group them in the background, so. Just sketch them in lightly, in order to place the figure. The khaki shirt hung thusly — and the open collar draped in this fashion. Now the outlines of the head and shoulders; be sure to catch the shrewd intensity, the concentrated concentration of the pose.

Stone had his sketch-pad out now, and his hands moved furiously. The sunlight would serve as a highlight over the shoulder. It would strike the silver pin and the reflection would fleck the features of the face.

The features — the face — most important. He began to rough it

in. If he could only capture the instant before the sob, if he could only fathom the secret of the eyes as the pin stabbed down, he'd have a painting.

What *was* that look? Stone had unconsciously catalogued and categorized the features. The proportions of nose to forehead, ears to head, chin to jaw; the relationship of brow and cheekbone to the eyes; he knew them and reproduced them. But the expression itself—particularly that look around the eyes—that was the key to it all.

And he couldn't get it down. He drew, erased, drew again. He made a marginal sketch and rubbed it out. The charcoal smeared his palm.

No, it was wrong, all wrong. He'd have to see him again. He was afraid to go, but he wanted that painting. He wanted to do it, he *had* to do it. There was a mystery here, and if he could only pin it down on canvas, he'd be satisfied.

Pin it down. The pin was what frightened him, he knew it now. It wasn't the man, so much. Granted, he was probably insane—without the pin he'd be harmless, deprived of weapons.

Stone stood up. He went out, down the stairs, walked. He should have gone to the rental agency first, he told himself, but the other need was greater. He wanted to see his subject once more. He

wanted to stare into the face of the little fat man and read the secret behind it.

And he did. He climbed the stairs silently, mounted the crate quietly, directed his soundless gaze over the transom.

The fat man was still at work. New books, new papers bulked high on the big table. But the left hand turned the pages, the right hand poised the pin. And the endless, enigmatic pantomime played on. Sigh, stab, sob. Stop and shudder, shuffle through fresh pages, scan and scrutinize again, and then—sigh, stab, sob.

The silver pin glared and glistered. It glowed and glittered and grew. Barton Stone tried to study the face of the fat man, tried to impress the image of his eyes.

Instead, he saw the pin. The pin and only the pin. The pin that poised, the pin that pointed, the pin that pricked the page.

He forced himself to concentrate on the little man's face, forced himself to focus on form and features. He saw sorrow, read resignation, recognized revulsion, found fear there. But there was neither sorrow nor resignation, revulsion or fear in the hand that drove the pin down again and again. There was only a mechanical gesture, without pattern or meaning that Barton Stone could decipher. It was the action of a lunatic, the antic gesture of aberration.

Stone stepped down from the crate, replaced it in the corner, then paused before the loft door. For a moment he hesitated. It would be so simple merely to walk into the loft, confront the little man, ask him his business. The little man would look up, and Stone could stare into his eyes, single out and scrutinize the secrets there.

But the little man had his pin, and Stone was afraid. He was afraid of the pin that didn't sob or sigh, but merely stabbed down. And made its point.

The point — what was it?

Well, there was another way of finding out; the sensible way. Stone sidled softly down the stairs, padded purposefully up the street.

Here it was, *Acme Rentals*. But the door was locked. Barton Stone glanced at his watch. Only four o'clock. Funny he'd be gone so early, unless he'd left with a client to show some property or office-space.

Stone sighed. Tomorrow, then. Time enough. He turned and strode back down the street. He intended to go to his flat and rest before supper, but as he rounded the corner he saw something that stopped him in his tracks.

It was only a brownish blur, moving very fast. His eye caught a glimpse of khaki, a suggestion of a bowed back, a white-thatched

head disappearing into the doorway of a local restaurant. That was enough; he was sure, now. His little fat man had taken time out to eat.

And that meant —

Stone ran the remaining blocks, clattered up the rickety stairs. He burst into the loft, raced over to the table. Then, and then only, he stopped. What was he doing here? What did he hope to find out? What was he looking for?

That was it. He was looking for something. Some clue, some intimation of the little fat man's perverted purpose.

The books and papers billowed balefully all about him. There were at least half-a-hundred presently on the table. Stone picked up the first one. It was a telephone directory, current edition, for Bangor, Maine. Beneath it was another — Yuma, Arizona. And below that, in a gaudy cover, the city directory of Montevideo. At one side a long list of names, sheet after sheet of them, in French. The Town Roll of Dijon. And over at one side, the electoral rolls of Manila, P. I. Another city directory — Stone guessed it must be in Russian. And here was the phone-book from Leeds, and the census sheets from Calgary, and a little photostat of the unofficial census of Mombasa.

Stone paged through them, then directed his attention to another stack on the right-hand side of the

table. Here were opened books aplenty, piled one upon the other in a baffling miscellany. Stone glanced at the bottom of the collection. Another phone-book, from Seattle. City directory of Belfast. Voting list from Bloomington, Illinois. Precinct polling list, Melbourne, Australia. Page after page of Chinese ideographs. Military personnel, USAAF, Tokyo base. A book in Swedish or Norwegian — Stone wasn't sure which, but he recognized that it contained nothing but names; and like all the others it was recent, or currently published and in use.

And here, right on top, was a Manhattan directory. It was open, like the others, and apparently the choice of page had been made upon random impulse. Barton Stone glanced at the heading. FRE. Was there a pin-mark? He stared, found it.

Freed, George A. And the address.

Wait a minute! Wasn't that *his* rental agency man? Something began to form and fashion, and then Stone pushed the book away and ran out of the room and down the stairs and he rounded the corner and found the newsstand and bought his paper and clawed it open to the death-notices and then he read the name again.

Freed, George A. And the address. And on another page — Stone's

hands were trembling and it took him a while to find it — was the story. It had happened this morning. Accident. Hit by a truck crossing the street. Survived by, blah, blah, blah.

Yes, blah, blah, blah, and this morning (perhaps while Stone had been watching him the first time) the pin had pointed and stabbed and a name in the directory was marked for destruction. For death.

For Death!

Nobody'd ever bother looking up there. You could hide out there for years without being caught. Yes, you could gather together all the lists, all the sources, all the names in the world and put them into that deserted loft. You could sit there, day after day and night after night, and stick pins into them the way the legends said witches stuck pins into effigies of their victims. You'd sit there and choose book after book at random, and the pin would point. And wherever it struck, somebody died. You could do that, and you *would* do that. If you were the little fat man. The little fat man whose name was *Death*.

Stone almost laughed, although the sound didn't come out that way. He'd wondered why he couldn't get the little man's eyes right, wondered why he couldn't search out their secret. Now he knew. He'd encountered the final mystery — that of *Death* itself. *Death, himself.*

And where was Death now? Sitting in a cheap restaurant, a local hash-house, taking a breather. Death was dining out. Simple enough, wasn't it? All Stone need do now was find a policeman and take him into the joint.

"See that little fat guy over there? I want you to arrest him for murder. He's Death, you know. And I can prove it. I'll show you the pinpoint."

Simple. *Insanely* simple.

Maybe he was wrong. He *had* to be wrong. Stone riffled back to the death-notices again. Kooley, Leventhaler, Mautz. He had to make sure.

Kooley, Leventhaler, Mautz.

Question: how long does it take for Death to dine?

Question: does Death care to linger over a second cup of coffee?

Question: does one dare go back and search that directory to find the pinpoints opposite the names *Kooley, Leventhaler and Mautz?*

The first two questions couldn't be answered. They constituted a calculated risk. The third question could be solved only by action.

Barton Stone acted. His legs didn't want to move, his feet rebelled every step of the way, and his hands shook as he climbed the stairs once more.

Stone almost fell as he peered over the transom. The loft was still empty. And it was shrouded,

now, in twilight. The dusk filtering through the skylight provided just enough illumination for him to read the directory. To find the names of Kooley, Leventhaler and Mautz. And the pinpoints penetrating each, puncturing the *o*, the *v*, the *u*. Puncturing their names, puncturing their lives, providing punctuation. The final punctuation — period.

How many others had died today, in how many cities, towns, hamlets, crossroads, culverts, prisons, hospitals, huts, *kraals*, trenches, tents, igloos? How many times had the silver pin descended, forced by fatal fancy?

Yes, and how many times would it descend tonight? And tomorrow, and the next day, and forever and ever time without end, amen?

They always pictured Death wielding a scythe, didn't they? And to think that it was really just a pin — a pin with a curve or a hook in it. A long, sharp silver pin, like *that one there*.

The last rays of the dying sunset found it, set its length ablaze in a rainbow glow. Stone gasped, sharply. It was here, right here on the table, where the little fat man had left it when he went out to eat — the silver pin!

Stone eyed the sparkling instrument, noted the hooked end, and gasped again. It *was* a scythe, after all! A little miniature scythe of silver. The weapon of Death which cut down all mankind. Cut

down mankind without rhyme or reason, stabbed senselessly to deprive men forever of sensation. Stone could picture it moving in frantic rhythm over the names of military personnel, pick, pick, picking away at lives; point, point, pointing at people; stick, stick, sticking into human hearts. The fatal instrument, the lethal weapon, smaller than any sword and bigger than any bomb.

It was *here*, on the table.

He had only to reach out and take it —

For a moment the sun stood still and his heart stopped beating and there was nothing but Silence in the whole wide world.

Stone picked up the pin.

He put it in his shirt-pocket and stumbled out of the room, stumbled through darkness and tumbled down the flights of the night.

Then he was out on the street again, and safe. He was safe, and the pin was safe in his pocket, and the world was safe forever.

Or was it? He couldn't be sure.

He couldn't be sure, and he couldn't be sure, and he sat there in his room all night long, wondering if he'd gone completely mad.

For the pin was only a pin. True, it was shaped like a miniature scythe. True, it was cold and did not warm to the touch, and its point was sharper than any tool could ever grind.

But he couldn't be sure. Even

the next morning, there was nothing to show. He wondered if Death read the papers. He couldn't read *all* the papers. He couldn't attend *all* the funerals. He was too busy. Or, rather, he *had* been too busy. Now he could only wait, as Stone was waiting.

The afternoon editions would begin to provide proof. The home editions. Stone waited, because he couldn't be sure. And then he went down to the corner and bought four papers and he knew.

There were death-notices, still; of course there would be. Death-notices from yesterday. *Only* from yesterday.

And the front-pages carried further confirmation. The subject-matter of the stories was serious enough, but the treatment was still humorous, quizzical, or at best, speculative and aloof. Lots of smart boys on the wire-services and the city desks; too hardboiled to be taken in or commit themselves until they were certain. So there was no editorial comment, yet; just story after story, each with its own "slant".

The prisoner up at Sing-Sing who went to the chair last night — and was still alive. They'd given him plenty of juice, and the power worked, all right. The man had fried in the hot seat. Fried, literally, but lived. Authorities were investigating —

Freak accident up in Buffalo —

cables snapped and a two-ton safe landed squarely on the head and shoulders of Frank Nelson, 42. Broken back, neck, arms, legs, pelvis; skull completely crushed. But in Emergency Hospital, Frank Nelson was still breathing and doctors could not account for —

Plane crash in Chile. Eighteen passengers, all severely injured and many badly burned when engines caught fire, but no fatalities were reported and further reports —

City hospitals could not explain the sudden cessation of deaths throughout Greater New York and environs —

Gas main explosions, automobile accidents, fires and natural disasters; each item isolated and treated as a freak, a separate phenomenon.

That's the way it would be until, perhaps, tomorrow, when the hardboiled editors and the hardheaded medical men and the hardshelled Baptists and the hard-nosed military leaders and the hardpressed scientists all woke up, pooled their information, and realized that Death had died.

Meanwhile, the torn and the twisted, the burned and the maimed, the tortured and the broken ones writhed in their beds — but breathed and lived, in a fashion.

Stone breathed and lived, in a fashion, too. He was beginning to see the seared body of the convict,

the mangled torso of the mover, the agonized forms that prayed for the mercy of oblivion all over the world.

Conscience doth make cowards of us all and no man is an island. But on the other hand, Stone breathed and lived, after a fashion. And as long as he had the pin, he'd breathe and live forever. Forever!

So would they all. And more would be born, and the earth would teem with their multitude — what then? Very well, let the editors and the doctors and the preachers and the soldiers and the scientists figure out solutions. Stone had done his part. He'd destroyed Death. Or at the least, disarmed him.

Barton Stone wondered what Death was doing right now. Death, in the afternoon. Was he sitting in the loft, pondering over his piles of useless papers, lingering over his lethal ledgers? Or was he out, looking for another job? Couldn't very well expect to get unemployment compensation, and he had no social security.

That was *his* problem. Stone didn't care. He had other worries.

The tingling, for example. It had started late that morning, around noon. At first Stone ascribed it to the fact that he hadn't eaten or slept for over twenty-four hours. It was fatigue. But fatigue gnaws. Fatigue does not bite. It

doesn't sink its sharp little tooth into your chest.

Sharp. Chest. Stone reached up, grabbed the silver pin from his pocket. The little scythe was cold. Its sharp, icy point had cut through his shirt, pricked against his heart.

Stone laid the pin down very carefully on the table, and he even turned the point away from himself. Then he sat back and sighed as the pain went away.

But it came back again, stronger. And Stone looked down and saw that the pin pointed at him again. He hadn't moved it. He hadn't touched it. He hadn't even looked at it. But it swung around like the needle of a compass. And he was its magnetic pole. He was due North. North, cold and icy like the pains that shot through his chest.

Death's weapon had power — the power to stab him, stab his chest and heart. It couldn't kill him, for there was no longer any dying in the world. It would just stab him now, forever and ever, night and day for all eternity. He was a magnet, attracting pain. Unendurable, endless pain.

The realization transfixed him, just as the point of the pin itself transfixed him.

Had his own hand reached out and picked up the pin, driven it into its chest? Or had the pin itself risen from the table and sought its magnetic target? Did the pin have

its own powers? He wondered.

Yes. That was the answer, and he knew it now. Knew that the little fat man was just a man and nothing more. A poor devil who had to go out and eat, who slept and dozed as best he could while he still stabbed ceaselessly away. He was only a tool. *The pin itself was Death.*

Had the little man once looked over a transom or peered through a window in New York or Bagdad or Durban or Rangoon? Had he stolen the silver pin from yet another poor devil and then been driven by it; driven out into the street by the pin that pricked and pricked at his heart? Had he returned to the place where all the names in the world awaited their final sentencing?

Barton Stone didn't know. All he knew was that the pin was colder than arctic ice and hotter than volcanic fire, and it was tearing at his chest. Every time he tore it free, the point inexorably returned and his hand descended with it, forcing the pin into his chest. Sigh, stab, sob — the power of Death was in the pin.

And the power of Death animated Barton Stone as he ran through the nighted streets, panted up the midnight stairs, staggered into the loft.

A dim light burned over the table, casting its glow over the waiting shadows. The little fat man sat there, surrounded by his

books, and when he saw Barton Stone he looked up and nodded.

His stare was impersonal and blank. Stone's stare was agonized and intent. There was something Stone had to find out, once and for all; a question which must be answered. He recognized its nature and the need, sought and found his solution in the little fat man's face.

The little fat man *was* a man, and nothing more. He *was* merely the instrument, and the pin held all the power. That was enough for Barton Stone to know. It was all he could know, for the rest was only endless pain. He had to be relieved of the pain, had to be released from it, just as the poor

devils all over the world had to be relieved and released. It was logic, cold logic; cold as the pin, cold as Death.

Stone gasped, and the little fat man stood up and moved around from behind the table.

"I've been waiting for you," he said. "I knew you'd come back."

Stone forced the words out. "I stole the pin," he panted. "I've come to give it back — back where I got it."

The little fat man looked at him, and for the first time, Stone could read his eyes. In them he saw infinite compassion, limitless understanding, and an endless relief.

"What is taken cannot be returned," murmured the little man.



"Answer the table, will you, Marge?"

"I think you know that. When you took the pin, you took it forever. Or until —"

The little man shrugged and indicated the seat behind the table.

Silently, Stone sat down. The books bulked before him; the books, the directories, the papers and scrolls and lists that contained all the names in the world.

"The most urgent are on top," whispered the little man. "I sorted them while I waited."

"Then you knew I'd be back?"

The little fat man nodded. "I came back, once, too. And I found — as you will find — that the pain goes away. You can remove the pin now, and get to work. There's so much work to do."

He was right. There was no longer any stabbing sensation in Stone's chest. The little scythe-shaped pin came away quite easily and balanced in Stone's right hand. His left hand reached for the topmost book. A small piece of paper, bearing a single scribbled name, rested on the opened volume.

"If you don't mind," breathed the little fat man. "This name first, please."

Stone looked at the little fat man. He didn't look down at the scribbled name — he didn't have to, for he knew. And his right hand stabbed down, and the little man sighed and then he fell over and there was only a wisp of dust.

Old dust, gossamer-light dust, soon blows away. And there was no time to look at the dancing, dissipating motes. For Barton Stone was sighing, stabbing, shuddering, sobbing.

And the pin pointed and pricked. Pricked the convict up in Sing-Sing and Frank Nelson in Buffalo Emergency, and the crash victims in Chile. Pricked Chundra Lal of Bombay, Ramona Neilson of Minneapolis, Barney Yates in Glasgow, Igor Vorpetchzki in Minsk, Mrs. Minnie Haines and Doctor Fisher and Urbonga and Li Chan and a man named John Smith in Upper Sandusky.

It was day and it was night and it was summer and it was autumn and it was winter and it was spring and it was summer again but you could hide out there for years without being caught.

All you did was keep shuffling the books, picking at random. That was the best you could do, the only fair way. Sometimes you got mad and took a lot from one place; sometimes you just kept going, plodding along and leaving it up to the pin.

You sighed, you stabbed, you shuddered and you sobbed. But you never stopped. Because the pin never stopped, the scythe was always swinging.

Thus it was, and thus it would be, forever. Until the day came, inevitably, when somehow, somewhere, someone would find out . . .



Ever since 1928—when his first story, "The Metal Man," appeared in Amazing Stories—Jack Williamson has more than kept pace with a field that has come a long way since the days of Hugo Gernsback. In the 30's he won wide acclaim for the "Legion of Space" trilogy, which (in the 40's) he followed up with major novels like The Humanoids. In their turn succeeded (more recently) by a healthy number of superb short stories such as the following flawless account of a Kansas hypocrite who really should have paid more attention when her little nephew warned her not to go around swatting houseflies because she might be injuring a friend!

COLD GREEN EYE

BY

JACK WILLIAMSON



"KANSAS?" The boy looked hard at his teacher. "Where is Kansas?"

"I do not know." The withered old monk shrugged vaguely. "The spring caravan will carry you down out of our mountains. A foreign machine called a railway train will take you to a city named Calcutta. The lawyers there will arrange for your journey to Kansas."

"But I love our valley." Tommy glanced out at the bamboo plumes nodding above the old stone walls of the monastery garden and the

snowy Himalayas towering beyond. He turned quickly back to catch the hold man's leathery hand. "Why must I be sent away?"

"A matter of money and the law."

"I don't understand the law," Tommy said. "But please, can't I stay? That's all I want — to be here with the monks of Mahavira, and play with the village children, and study my lessons with you."

"We used to hope that you might remain with us to become another holy man." Old Chandra Sha smiled wistfully behind the

cloth that covered his mouth to protect the life of the air from injury by his breath. "We have written letters about your unusual aptitudes, but the lawyers in Calcutta show little regard for the ancient arts, and those in Kansas show none at all. You are to go."

"But I don't need money," Tommy protested. "My friends in the village will give me rice, and I can sleep in the courtyard here."

"I think there is too much money, burdening souls with evil karma," the lean old man broke in softly. "Your father was a famous traveler, who gathered dangerous riches. Since the wheel has turned for him, others desire his fortune. I think perhaps that is why the lawyers sent for you."

A fly came buzzing around his dried-up face, and he paused to wave it very gently away.

"But your mother's sister lives in that place named Kansas," he went on. "It is arranged for you to go to her. She is your own race and blood, and she wants you in her home —"

"No! She never even saw me," Tommy whispered bitterly. "She couldn't really want me. Must I go?"

"It is to be." Chandra Sha nodded firmly. "Your people are ignorant about the true principles of matter and the soul, but their

own peculiar laws require obedience. The caravan leaves tomorrow."

Tommy wanted not to weep, but he was only ten. He clung sobbing to the thin old Jain.

"But we have instructed you well," the holy man murmured, trying to comfort him. "Your feet are already on the pathway to nirvana, and I will give you a copy of the secret book of Rishabha to guide and guard you on your way."

Tommy went down out of the mountains with the caravan. He was bewildered and afraid, and the motion of the railway cars made him ill, but the lawyers in Calcutta were kind enough. They bought him new garments, and took him to a cinema, and put him on a great strange machine called an airplane. At last he came to Kansas and his Aunt Agatha Grimm.

He rode from the depot to her home in a jolting farm truck, peering out at the strange sun-flooded flatness of the land and a monstrous orange-painted machine called a combine that grazed like the golden bull of Rishabha through the ripe wheat.

The hired man stopped the truck beside a huge wooden house that stood like a fort in the middle of the endless land, and Tommy's aunt came out to greet him with a



moist kiss. A plump, pink-skinned blonde, with a sweat-beaded face. He was used to darker women, and she seemed incredibly fair.

"So you're Lizzie's boy?" She and her sister had come from Alabama, and soft accents still echoed in her voice. "Gracious, honey, what's the matter?"

Tommy had run to meet her eagerly, but he couldn't help shrinking back when he saw her eyes. The left was warm and brown and kind as old Chandra Sha's. But the right eye was different, a frosty, bluish green; it seemed to look straight through him.

"Well, child, can't you talk?"

He gulped and squirmed, trying to think of words to say in English. But he couldn't think at all. Somehow, the green eye froze him.

"Nothing," he muttered at last. "Just . . . nothing."

"Lizzie's boy would be a little odd." She smiled, too sweetly. "Brought up by jabbering heathens! But this is going to be your home, you know. Come on inside, and let me clean you up."

The hired man brought the carved teakwood chest the monks had given him, and they went into the big house. The smell

of it was strange and stale. The windows were closed, with blinds drawn down. Tommy stood blinking at the queer heavy furniture and dusty bric-a-brac crammed into

the dim cave of the living room, until he heard a fly buzzing at the screen door behind him. He turned without thinking to help it escape.

"Wait, honey." His aunt caught his arm, and seated him firmly on the teakwood chest. "I'll kill it!"

She snatched a swatter from the high oak mantle and stalked the fly through the gloomy jungle of antimacassared chairs and fussy little tables to a darkened window. The swatter fell with a vicious *thwack*.

"Got him!" she said. "I won't endure flies."

"But, Aunt Agatha!" The English words were coming back, though his thoughts were still in the easy vernacular the monks had taught him. His shy, hesitant voice was shocked. "They, too, are alive."

The brown eye, as well as the green, peered sharply at him. His aunt sat down suddenly, gasping as if she needed fresh air. He wanted to open the windows, but he was afraid to move.

"Thomas, honey, you're upsetting me terribly." Her pale fat hands fluttered nervously. "But I guess you didn't know that I'm not well at all. Of course I love children as much as anybody, but I really don't know if I can endure you in the house. I always said myself that you'd be better off in some nice orphanage."



Or back with the monks, Tommy told himself unhappily. He could not help thinking that she looked as tough and strong as a mountain pony, but he decided not to mention that.

"But sick as I am, I'm taking you in." Her moist, swollen lips tried to smile. "Because you're Lizzie's boy. It's my duty, and the legal papers are all signed. But the judge gave me full control of you, and your estate, till you come of age. Just keep that in mind."



Tommy nodded miserably and huddled smaller on the chest.

"I'm giving you a decent home, and you ought to be grateful." A faint indignation began to edge her voice. "I never approved when Lizzie ran away to marry a good-for-nothing explorer -- not even if his long-winded books did make him rich. Served her right when they got killed trying to climb them foreign mountains! I guess she never had a thought of me -- her wandering like a gypsy queen through all of them wicked heathen countries, and never sending me a penny. A lot she cared if her own born sister had to drudge away like a common hired girl!"

Sudden tears shone in the one brown eye, but the other remained dry and hard as glass.

"But what I can't forgive is all she did to you." Aunt Agatha

snuffled and dabbled at her fat, pink nose. "Carrying you to all those outlandish foreign places, and letting you associate with all sorts of nasty natives. The lawyers said you've had no decent religious training, and I guess you've picked up goodness knows what superstitious notions. But I'll see you get a proper education."

"Thank you very much!" Tommy sat up hopefully. "I want to learn. Chandra Sha was teaching me Sanskrit and Arabic. I can speak Swahili and Urdu, and I'm studying the secret book of Rishabha --"

"Heathen idolatry!" The green eye and the brown widened in alarm. "Wicked nonsense you'll soon forget, here in Kansas. Simple reading and writing and arithmetic will do for the like of you, and a Christian Sunday school."

"But Rishabha was the first Thirtankara," Tommy protested timidly. "The greatest of the saints. The first to find nirvana."

"You little infidel!" Aunt Agatha's round pink face turned red. "But you won't find -- whatever you call it. Not here in Kansas! Now bring your things up to your room."

Staggering with the teakwood chest, he followed her up to a narrow attic room. It was hot as an oven, and it had a choking antiseptic smell. The dismal, purple-flowered wallpaper was faded and

water-stained. At the tiny window, a discouraged fly hummed feebly.

Aunt Agatha went after it.

"Don't!" Tommy dropped the chest and caught at her swatter. "Please, may I just open the window and let it go?"

"Gracious, child! What on earth?"

"Don't you know about flies?" A sudden determination steadied his shy voice. "They, too, have souls. It is wrong to kill them."

"Honey child, are you touched?"

"All life is akin, through the Cycle of Birth," he told her desperately. "The holy Jains taught me that. As the wheel of life turns, our souls go from one form to another — until each is purged of every karma, so that it can rise to nirvana."

She stood motionless, with the swatter lifted, frozen with astonishment.

"When you kill a fly," he said, "you are loading your own soul with bad karma. And, besides, you may be injuring a friend."

"Well, I never!" The swatter fell out of her shocked hand.

Tommy picked it up and gave it back to her, politely. "Such wicked heathen foolery! We'll pray to help you find the truth."

Tommy shuddered, as she crushed the weary fly.

"Now unpack your box," she commanded. "I'll have no filthy idols here."

"Please," he protested unhappily. "These things are my own."

The green eye was still relentless, but the brown one began to cry. Tears ran down her smooth sweet face, and her heavy bosom quaked.

"Tommy! How can you be so mulish? When I'm only trying to take your poor dead mother's place, and me such an invalid!"

"I'm sorry," he told her. "I hope your health improves. And I'll show you everything."

The worn key hung on a string around his neck. He unlocked the chest, but she found no idols. His clothing she took to be laundered, lifting each piece gingerly with two fingers as if it had been steeped in corruption. She sniffed at a fragrant packet of dried herbs, and seized it to be burned.



Finally, she bent to peer at the remaining odds and ends — at the brushes and paints his mother had given him when she left him with the monks; there were a few splotched watercolors he had tried to make of the monastery and the holy men and his village friends; the broken watch the mountaineers had found beside his father's body; a thick painted cylinder.

"That?" She pointed at his picture of a shy brown child. "Who's that?"

"Mira Bai. My friend." He covered the picture quickly with another, to hide it from that cold green eye. "She lived in my own village. She was my teacher's niece, and we used to study together. But her legs were withered and she was never strong. It was last year before the rains were ended that the wheel turned for her."

"What wheel?" Aunt Agatha sniffed. "Do you mean she's dead?"

"The soul never dies," Tommy answered firmly. "It always returns in a new body, until it escapes to nirvana. Mira Bai has a stronger body now, because she was good. I don't know where she is — maybe Kansas! But someday I'll find her, with the science of Rishabha."

"You poor little fool!" Aunt Agatha stirred his small treasures with the swatter handle, and

jabbed at the painted cylinder. "What's that contraption?"

"Just — just a book."

Very carefully, he slipped it out of the round wooden case and unrolled a little of the long parchment strip. It was very old, yellowed and cracked and faded. The mild brown eye squinted in a puzzled way at the dim strange characters. He wondered how much the green one saw.

"That filthy scribbling? That's no book."

"It is older than printing," he told her. "It is written with the secret wisdom of the Thirtankara Rishabha. It tells how souls may be guarded through their trans-migrations and helped upward toward nirvana."

"Heathen lies!" She reached for it angrily. "I ought to burn it."

"No!" He hugged it in his skinny arms. "Please don't! Because it is so powerful. I need it to aid my father and mother in their new lives. I need it to know

Mira Bai when I find her again. And I think you need it too, Aunt Agatha, to purge your own soul of the eight kinds of karma —"

"What?" The brown eye widened with shock and the green one narrowed angrily. "I'll have you know that I'm a decent Christian, safe in the heart of God. Now, put that filthy scrawl away and



wash yourself up. I guess *that's* something your verminous monks forgot to teach you."

"Please! The holy men are very clean."

"Now you're trying to aggravate me, poorly as I am." She snuffled and her brown eye wept again. "I'm going to teach you a respectable religion, and I don't need any nasty foreign scribbings to help me whip the sin out of you."



She was very sweet about it, and she always cried when she was forced to beat him. The exertion was really too much for her poor heart. She did it only for dear Lizzie's sake, and he ought to realize that the punishment was far more painful to her than to him.

She tried to teach him her religion, but Tommy clung to the wisdom of the kind old monks of Mahavira. She tried to wash the East out of him, with pounds of harsh yellow soap, until his sunburnt skin had faded to a sickly pallor. She prayed and cried over him for endless hours, while he knelt with numb bare knees on cruel bare floors. She threatened to whip him again, and she did.

She whipped him when he covered up the big sheets of sticky yellow fly paper she put in his room, and whipped him when he

poured out the shallow dishes of fly poison she kept on the landing. But she seemed too badly shaken to strike him, on the sultry afternoon when she found him liberating the flies in the screen wire trap outside the kitchen.

"You sinful little infidel!"

Her nerves were all on edge. She had to sit down on the doorstep, resting her weak heart and gasping with her asthma. But her fat pink fingers seemed strong enough when she caught him by the ear.

She called the hired man to bring a torch dipped in gasoline, and held him so that he had to watch while she burned the flies that were left in the trap. He stood shivering with his own pain, quiet and pale and ill.

"Now come along!" She led him up the stairs, by his twisted ear. "I'll teach you whether flies have souls." Her voice was like a saw when it strikes a nail. "I'm going to lock you up tonight without your supper, but I'll be up in the morning."

She shoved him into the stifling attic room. It was bare and narrow as the monastery cells, with



only his hard little cot and his precious teakwood chest. His tears blurred the painted carving on the chest — it was the blue snake of the *deva*. Parshva, who had reached nirvana

a very long time before.

She held him, by the twisted ear.

"Believe me, Thomas, this hurts me terribly." She snuffled and cleared her throat. "But I want you to pray tonight. Beg God to clean up your dirty little soul."

She gave his ear another twist.

"When I come back in the morning, I want you to get down on your bended knees with me and confess to Him that all this rot about flies with souls is only a wicked lie."

"But it's the truth!" He caught his breath, and tried not to whimper. "Please, Aunt Agatha, let me read you part of the sacred book —"

"Sacred?" She shook him by the ear. "You filthy little blasphemer! I'm going down now to pray for you. But when I come back in the morning, I'm going to open up your box and take away that heathen writing. I declare, it's what gives you all these wicked notions. I'm going to burn it in the kitchen stove."

"But — Aunt Agatha!" He shivered with a sharper pain. "Without the secret book I can't guide anybody toward nirvana. I can't help my father and mother, struggling under their load of karma. I won't even know little Mira Bai, if I should ever find her."

"I'll teach you what you need to know." She let go his tingling ear, and boxed it sharply. "We'll

burn that book in the morning. And you'll forget every word it says, or stay in this room till you starve."

She locked the door on him and waddled down the stairs again, weeping for his soul and wheezing with her asthma. She had a good nip of whisky for her heart, and filled herself a nice plate of cold roast chicken and potato salad before she went up to her own room to pray.

For a long time Tommy sat alone on the edge of the hard lumpy cot, with his throbbing head in his hands. Crying was no use; old Chandra Sha had taught him that. He longed for his father and mother, those tanned happy wanderers he could barely remember. But the wheel had turned for them.

Nothing was left, except the sacred parchment. When the ringing in his punished ear had stopped, he bent to unlock the teakwood chest. He unrolled the brittle yellow scroll. His pale lips moved silently, following the faded black-and-scarlet characters.

The book, he felt, was more precious than all Kansas. He had to save it, to help his reborn parents, and to find Mira Bai, and even to aid his aunt. Her poor soul was laden, surely, with a perilous burden of karma, but perhaps the science of the book could find her a more fortunate rebirth.

Trembling and afraid, he began to do what the holy men had taught him.

It was the hired girl, next morning, who came up to unlock his room. She was looking for his Aunt Agatha.

"I can't understand it." Her twangy Kansas voice was half hysterical. "I didn't hear a thing, all night long. The outside doors are locked up tight, and none of her things are missing. But I've looked high and low, and your sweet old auntie isn't anywhere."

The little boy looked thin and pale and drawn. His dark eyes were rimmed with grime, hollowed for want of sleep. He was rolling up the long strip of brittle yellow parchment. Very carefully, he replaced it in the painted case.

"I think you wouldn't know her now." His shy little voice was rusty and regretful. "Because the wheel of her life has turned again. She has entered another cycle, you see."

"I don't know what you mean." The startled girl stared at him. "But I'm afraid something awful has happened to your poor old

auntie. I'm going to phone the sheriff."

Tommy was downstairs in the gloomy front room when the sheriff came, standing in a chair drawn up against the mantle.

"Now don't you worry, little man," the sheriff boomed. "I'm come to find old Miz Grimm. Just tell me when you seen her last."

"Here she is, right now," Tommy whispered faintly. "But if you haven't been instructed in the science of transmigration, I don't think you'll know her."

He was leaning over one of the big yellow sheets of adhesive fly paper that Aunt Agatha liked to leave spread at night to catch flies while she slept. He was trying to help a big blue fly, that was hopelessly tangled and droning in its last feeble fury.

"Pore little young-un!" The sheriff clucked sympathetically. "His aunt told me he was full of funny heathen notions!"

He didn't even glance at the dying fly. But Tommy hadn't found it hard to recognize. Its right eye was a furious, bluish green, and the left was a tiny bead of wet brown glass.

◆
EVERY science has been an outcast.
— Robert G. Ingersoll

▲
EQUIPPED with his five senses, man explores the universe around him and calls the adventure Science.

— Edwin Powell Hubble, *Science*





Draws the Bow

By MANLY WADE WELLMAN

When we revived the first of the exceedingly popular Hok stories—see "Battle in the Dawn" (March, 1967)—we knew you would probably enjoy its lusty action and Stone Age verisimilitude as much as we did. We didn't, however, expect your enthusiasm to top our own—great as it is—but that's exactly what happened. So of course (for all of us) here's more about Hok, this time a tense tale of his almost fatal encounter with Romm, the free hunter, who could cast a javelin further than any man alive—including Hok—and who was worshipped by the beast-like Gnorrls—Hok's deadly enemies!

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THEY all died long ago, at the hands of our ancient ancestors in the bitterest and most final war of all human history and prehistory, but we still wonder at their grotesque remains—the Neanderthal Men that were not men, but somehow a different and rival race. Fierce and cunning and horrific, they had to be exterminated if our fathers would live in the Europe they found thirty thousand years ago.

The Neanderthaler was gross and shambling and hideous, portotype of ogre and troll; but he fashioned and used tools with those great meaty hands of his, built fires, cooked meat, joined with his fellows in great bands for war and hunting. We know that he worshipped, for he buried his dead with provisions and weapons for use in an afterlife. We do not think he had art, but we cannot be sure. And no man can say into what pattern fell his thoughts, for they were not such thoughts as we think.

His skull was primitive, thick, almost browless: but what it lacked at the front it made up in a great swelling occiput, and its whole tissue approximated in size and weight many modern brains. What would be his ethics, impulses, his likes and dislikes? The only surety is that they differed from our own—were so different that when our true forefathers, the tall handsome hunters of the Upper Stone Age, met

such hairy ogres, they could not make treaties or agreements. It was war, and to the death.

It was a long war and desperate. Not only was there close and awful combat, to the last drop of blood and the last ounce of strength; there was brilliant thought and planning and courage, and inventions mothered by sternest necessity—inventions that seem simple enough to us now, but which then changed the fate of whole continents and epochs. We wonder about such matters, cannot help wondering, imagining, making mind-pictures of how things may have fallen out in that grim youth of the world.

And so—another adventure of Hok the Mighty, chief of cave-dwelling hunters, as he strove against the abominable beast-folk he called Gnorrls.

—M. W. W.

“HAI” cried Hok, for the love of battle was strong in his breast. Now he lifted the first of his javelins and, scarcely aiming it, he sent it in a short arc to the chest of the closest Gnorrl. Hok was shouting now, and the battle cries of his tribe rang from his lips.

He had come on them accidentally, and it had been contrary to his nature not to offer them battle, though they outnumbered a hundred to his one. His legs planted apart, he sent

the second javelin spinning through the air. "Remember Hok!" he called.

They were Gnorrls, right enough—hairy, burly abhorrent—but they were not acting like Gnorrls. Instead of charging in a howling mass, they formed into a skirmish line and closed in, twenty or so very cannily.

Noticing this strange behavior, Hok grew wary, and even in battle, his eyes became thoughtful. He had left only his stone axe with its span-wide edge, his poniard as sharp as a sting, slung in the girdle that held up his clout.

At the very first moment he drew away from them. Cleanlimbed, long-legged, deep-chested, his tawny hair flowing behind him, he was a famous runner. He was less bulky than they, and he towered above their tallest by the height of his proud head. His moccasined feet touched the snowy ground like a stag's hoofs, and as he ran, his face grimaced in disgust.

Anyway, he would soon be clear of their swiftest—those bandy legs and heavy bones could not begin to match his hunter's lope. Even though they had surprised him as he roamed among the crusted drifts near to their stamping grounds, they could never catch Hok, strongest and swiftest of the true men.

But, even as he drew far ahead, his blue eyes snapped with the cold fire of desperation. For he

was running down a long, gentle slope, tufted with leafless thickets above the snow crust, and at the bottom was a winter river—but not frozen! Here the channel was narrow, and the current raced too rapidly even for the ice-spirit to clutch. Before many breaths' space he would be there—would have to swim that blood-stopping water—no, that would be impossible!

Because the Gnorrls lumbering behind him were not pursuing alone. Along the river-bank to right and left other parties appeared, closing in. He could not break either way, and if he sprang into the water their hurled stones would smash out his brains before he could flounder across. Hok was trapped!

Knowing that, he turned and faced the beast-men as they converged upon him. The fear of the Gnorrl still touched his heart, as from his first boyhood encounter with them; but not they nor smarter creatures could have guessed it from his challenging glare, the flash of teen in his beard, the upward whirl of the war-axe in his great cobble of a fist. So formidable was his coming to bay that the three bands of Gnorrls wavered, snarling and jibbering, even as they came together and formed a half-circle to trap him with his back to the racing torrent.

"Come on and fight, Gnorrls!" Hok roared at them and saved

the rest of his breath for the last and grimmest struggle that he thought was upon him.

But at that instant something buzzed through the air from behind him, like a huge wasp, and the centermost Gnorrl of the half-circle suddenly stiffened, dropped his club, and fell limply on his back. The shaft of a javelin sprouted from the thing's gross, shaggy chest. And the others, who had wavered, now stopped in their tracks and burst into a chorus of dismayed whines and wails.

Hok flexed his muscles—he was for leaping straight at the line, smashing his way through. But again there was diversion from across the river to his rear.

A voice made itself heard, a human voice that roared in gutturals—it seemed to be imitating the Gnorrl language in mocking defiance. Hok had insulted Gnorrls like that in the past . . . but the half-human monsters were more dismayed by the voice than by the spearcast. They began to stumble backward, breaking their formation. More shouting at them from over the river and they actually turned and fled. Hok leaned upon his axe, and was grateful to whoever had so strangely rescued him.

"Hai, you chief of men!" bawled that same rescuer. "You are safe now! Walk upstream a few paces—there is a broadening, and ice enough to cross! Come to

me! I will wait here for you!"

Hok had time and safety now, he turned and looked.

Three ten-tens of paces away, with the river and much other width between him and Hok, stood the figure of a tall, lean man in a muffling mantle of bison-pelt. Hok scowled in mystification. Three ten-tens—had the stranger thrown a javelin so far and so straight? Even so shortly after deadly peril, Hok was able to feel chagrin that he himself could not do much better, if at all. He salvaged the weapon that had pierced the now dead Gnorrl. Then obeying the words and gestures of the man beyond the river, he trotted to where the ice would bear his weight and bring him across.

The other came to meet him—strangely roan-red of hair, with the beard plucked clean from his square, shallow jaw in token of bachelorhood. Hok met the gaze of two eyes, brilliant but close-set, that seemed to sneer. But Hok was not one to forget his manners.

"Who shall Hok thank for standing his friend against those Gnorrls?" he asked formally.

"I am Romm, the free hunter, wandering to see new and pleasant countries," was the airy reply. "Your name is Hok? Are you not the chief of that tribe that lives to southward along this same river, the man whom

the hairy folk—the Gnorrls, as you name them—call the Slayer From Afar?”

Hok's jaw must have dropped in wonder, for the stranger laughed without particular abashment. "Oh, I know the language of the creatures," he elaborated. "I have long observed them, you might say. Come, Hok, you stand my debtor for saving your life. Will you not invite me to visit your camp and tribe?"

It was badly requested, but again Hok did the polite thing. "Come," he said, and turned downstream along the river. Romm followed, and the two began to travel toward Hok's country.

On the way, Romm did most of the talking—an incessant recounting of the wonders he had seen in many countries to south and east, of his love-successes with stranger women, his cleverness in hunting and battle. Yet, for all his verbosity, he remained a figure of mystery not easy for Hok to estimate or classify.

"You have learned the language of the Gnorrls," Hok found time to remind him. "When you yelled at them across the river, was it to frighten them?"

"In a way—yes," grinned Romm. "At any rate, they left you alone."

"It was as though you had given them an order," pursued Hok.

"In a way—yes," repeated

Romm, with more of his characteristic mockery. "An order—it seemed like that. But you thank me too much, Hok. Perhaps you are more useful to me if you remain alive."

Hok opined weightily that any good man was more useful when alive, and Romm laughed and laughed. One thing Hok did not mention about the rescue, and when they camped that night in a little cedar-rimmed hollow, Romm himself brought it up.

"How did you like my javelin-casting?" he inquired.

"It was well done," responded Hok, who found it harder and harder to maintain his gratitude toward this rescuer of his.

"Well done!" echoed Romm. "Can you say no more? But I can cast a javelin farther than any living man."

Hok said nothing. It had been his private opinion for years that he, himself, was the best javelin-thrower in the world.

On the next day, shortly after noontide, they reached Hok's stronghold. Hok led the way in, by a narrow runway between high bluff and swift water, and Romm followed him to the lip of a lune-shaped beach made by a backward curve of the bluffs. The only other way out was a ladder-like trail that slanted to the top of the high ground.

From the clump of conical huts, made of woven willows and clay

daub, came Hok's people to greet their chief and stare at his guest—thirty huge-limbed hunters, with their women and children, some ninety or a hundred in all. Some were tawny like Hok, some were brunettes from further south who had gathered under the mighty chieftain for leadership and protection; but none of them had ever seen a roan-head like Romm, who rather gloried in the attention he drew.

"This is Romm," Hok introduced him. "He saved me from some Gnorrls—he speaks their tongue, and may help us fight them."

Romm replied with another of his ready chuckles that did not invite anyone to share his mirth. "What if I do not care to fight Gnorrls?" he asked, for all to hear. "Men of the riverside, does this big chief of yours waste your strength in useless war?"

In the forefront of a knot of hunters stood Zhik, the brother of Hok, two years his junior and a sub-chief of the clan. Like Hok in color and features, he was only a finger's breadth smaller all around. He took a slouching step forward, scowling.

Romm did not appear to notice. His bright, narrow-set eyes were questing elsewhere among the onlookers. "You have handsome women here, Hok," said he.

Hok followed Romm's gaze, and saw that it had found a comely woman with black hair and a gold-

en-tanned skin. She had come from Hok's own residence, the grotto in the bluff behind and above the huts. Now she turned her back, in modest dislike of Romm's searching regard. Hok's nostrils twitched and an icy light kindled in his own eyes. "That is Oloana, my wife," he warned Romm bleakly.

"Mmmmm—yes." Romm was not abashed. "Women are won by fighting of their men, is that not so? If someone fought and beat you, Hok—"

Zhik growled and spat in the sand, and made a leaping stride that brought him within reach of Romm. "Hok, I do not like this stranger," he snapped. His hand darted to his hip, swift as a juror's and came away with a beautifully ground dagger of deer-horn. "Let me slit open his narrow belly and see how his blood discolors the ground."

"I am your guest, Hok—in your protection," said Romm hastily, and Hok thrust Zhik back with the heel of a hand against his chest.

"It cannot be, Zhik," he said; then saw that Romm, for all his claim of hospitality rights, had drawn from his own girdle a little hand-axe with a narrow, chisel-like blade—a weapon that could drive to the brain with a single flick of the wrist. Hok's other big hand shot out like the paw of a cat and struck Romm's

wrist, so that the axe was knocked to earth.

"No fighting," commanded Hok. "Romm, it is best that you make no enemies here. My men are skilled with weapons."

"With the javelin?" asked Romm, who seemed to have conquered his momentary nervousness. "They do well with that, I suppose—and you, of course, surpass them all?"

"I, too, am thought skillful at javelin," Romm informed the gathering. "It would be sport, I think, for Hok and me to cast javelins against each other to see who made the farthest throw—two out of three trials."

Eager for diversion, the tribesmen applauded. Hok gazed at his guest, so ready with challenges and evidently so confident of victory. Could he, Hok, afford to take up such a defiance? Nay, could he afford to refuse?

"Let javelins be brought," he directed some halfgrown boys. "We will go to the meadow beyond here, and Romm and I will match our skill."

He led the way up the slanting path that mounted the bluff.

Chapter II The Javelin-Throwing

The clan gathered quickly—men who happened not to be hunting, women who could drop their work, children in winter garments of rabbit-fur and soft

deerskin. At Hok's direction, two of the biggest boys stepped off a hundred paces in the snow, planted a branch of cedar, then a second hundred paces and a second branch, and finally a third.

"A fourth ten-ten mark, too," requested Romm, who was squinting along the shaft of a javelin. Hok stared, and Romm snickered. "Perhaps three tens of paces is your limit, Hok, but I can do better."

Hok raised his great voice, so that the distant lads heard him. "Pace off another ten-ten!" he yelled, and all who watched murmured together in wonder. Who had ever cast a javelin four tens of paces?

"Will you try first?" said Hok courteously to his rival, who grinned in some secret mockery and chose one of the javelins scattered upon the snow. He threw off his bison-wool robe, caught the shaft by its balance, took his stance carefully, and threw it. High in the air twinkled the shaft, a dazzling streak against the cloudless blue of the sky. It clumbled a great slope of space, skimmed smoothly into its downward path, and drove into the snow well past the middle of the third hundred paces.

A watching lad quickly stepped off the distance, shouted the result to a nearer comrade, who passed it on to the gathered watchers. Two ten-tens and sixty-eight paces—a more than ade-

quate throw. But Hok had done as well in the days before he had come to his present growth and strength. Dropping his lion's skin, he stood forth in the crisp bright air with only a clout and high moccasins. Disdaining to choose among the javelins, he caught up the nearest, set himself with left foot forward and left hand lifted as though to point. A quick flexing of all his sinews, a driving of his strength in behind the launched weapon, and it went singing like a locust along the trail of Romm's attempt.

Every eye followed the course of the missile, and the younger men chorused a cheer as they saw it rise to a greater height than Romm's had attained. The javelin angled downward and into the snow—beyond the first throw of Romm.

Jubilation on the part of all the very prejudiced watchers as the boy paced the distance and hooted it back—two hundred and eighty-nine paces. Only Hok was silent, reserved. Romm laughed with the others, but in his secret manner that was becoming such an irritation.

"You have beaten me—once," he acknowledged cheerfully. "I thought to allow you that much. But two more trials remain."

He fumbled in a belt-bag and produced a piece of buckskin cord, as long as his arm and very thin, round and even. Then he selected another javelin and,

while Hok and the others gazed in mystification, began a strange activity. He hitched one end of the cord around the javelin, just rearward of the balance, and then wound the rest in tight, even spirals, around and around, until only the other end of buckskin remained clear. This part was split, and into the opening Romm hooked his thumb.

"This is a trick of my own devising," he chuckled, and grasped the balance of the weapon. Again he took his stance, drew back his arm and launched the javelin. At the same moment, his thumb jerked strongly upon the cord.

That violent pull unwound the wrapping, almost instantaneously. It spun the javelin as a fire-drill is spun between the palms. As the shaft took the air, it yelped rather than sang—tore up and up and up into the sky, as though it would never come down. Hok's eyes, following that amazing journey, widened apprehensively . . . and then the boy was reporting that the distance was three ten-tens and thirty-two paces.

The murmur of the watchers became a hubbub. Nobody had ever seen such a throw, nor had they heard of one, even in the legends of their grandsires. Hok made himself stand and speak calmly, but he breathed deeply as he put out a hand and fingered the string that still dangled from Romm's thumb.

"There is great strength in that buckskin," he pronounced, and Romm laughed yet again.

"You did not think that such a cast was possible," he taunted Hok. "Do you give up the trial, big man, or will you continue and be beaten?"

All pricked up their ears. Nobody had ever dared speak thus to Hok. Out of the group of young hunters that stood nearest moved Zhik as before, and he sauntered dangerously, like a panther on the hunt. His hand clenched on the hilt of his dagger.

"Hok," he almost wheedled, "let me cut the throat of this ill-mannered stranger."

Romm stooped swiftly for yet another javelin, but Hok lifted his broad hand. "He is my guest, Zhik." And, to Romm, "I will throw a second time. Watch."

He took up his shaft, studied it and the ground and the far upward jut of that string-spiced throw of his rival. In his heart he knew that such a feat was beyond his own simple skill. Then a plan came to suggest itself, and he almost smiled in his beard, but forebore. He placed himself, gathered his strength, and threw. Compared to Romm's peerless attempt, his javelin seemed barely to rise above treetop height. And it came down almost exactly between the marks made by his own first attempt and Romm's.

"Two ten-tens and seventy-eight!" called out the marker from

afar. There was aghast silence, broken only by Romm's laugh.

"Your second is less than your first," he said to Hok, and to the watchers: "Ho, people! This chief of yours has a weak arm and a dim eye. Would you not rather follow a true javelin-master like me?"

It was offered as a joke, but one or two received the suggestion seriously. There were men who were jealous of Hok. They smiled back at Romm, and whispered together. Zhik glared that way, and once again he half-drew his dagger.

Hok watched Romm pick up and wind his third javelin. The fellow's hope seemed suddenly clear to him. He would beat Hok in this contest, but make capital of it slowly. He would gather some admirers—malcontents and young hero-worshippers—and wait his time. Some day, when Hok was absent or ill, he might try to seize power . . . Romm was gazing again at the group of women. His close-set eyes frankly admired Oloana, who turned away as before. Then Romm spoke to Hok:

"Your throws are beneath my best striving," he sneered, and with careless ease spun away his javelin. High it went, but not so high as before, and it fell to drill itself into the snow just on the near side of the third marker-branch. "Two ten-tens and ninety-eight!" cried the marker.

Romm shrugged, thrust his throwing cord into his bag, and turned his back as though scornful to see the final attempt of his rival. And now, for the first time, Hok showed care in choosing a javelin.

He picked up and discarded three before he found one that pleased him—a straight and flawless shaft, a light, narrow head. He tried its balance and spring carefully. Then he planted his feet with precision, poised himself twice and finally, with all the strength and skill of his huge wise body, made his final cast.

Away hummed the javelin, and in its wake rose the roar of Hok's people. For it was such a cast as Hok had never made, as no other man could have made without such a device as Romm possessed. It was coming down now—even with Romm's third try—no, beyond! And the marker was pacing off, and shouting his result: "Three ten-tens and nine paces!"

The winter air seemed to smoke and quiver with the prolonged howling of Hok's people. Even those who had been ready to side with Romm were dancing and whooping. It was long moments before the din abated and Hok could hear the harsh accusation of Romm, voiced through set teeth:

"It was not fair! You tricked me—made your second throw

weak, so that I would not do my best the third time!"

But it was Hok's turn to exult. His big white teeth glittered in the sun-brightness of his beard. "Call it a trick, if you will. I matched my hearts trickery against the trickery of your buckskin thong. Twice out of three times I outthrew you."

"It was false! Cowardly!" Romm raged. His half-built fabric of sedition against Hok was crumbled to nothing, and he lost all caution and control. "I will—"

His fist flew out, and Hok twitched up a great shoulder to ward the blow from his jaw. His smile grew broader.

"You have struck at me," he said, as silence fell all around them. "I owe you no further debt of hospitality or protection. And if this is to be a contest of strength—"

With the swiftness of a lashing snake, he hurled his own boulder-like fist into the center of Romm's angry visage, and the trickster somersaulted twice backward before he lay still and stunned, his eyes closed and blood on his nose and mouth.

The silence remained. Hok stooped for Romm's bison-wool mantle, then walked to the side of his motionless adversary and spread it over him. He lifted Romm's javelins and broke them, one and then the other, across his lifted knee, and dropped the pieces on the snow-crust. Finally

he rummaged in Romm's belt-bag and secured the buck-skin thong whereby such amazing feats of javelin-throwing had been achieved.

"And now," he addressed the onlookers, "return to your work or other occupation. When this man awakens, he should know that he is not to see us any more. But if he tries to come back among us, let the children throw stones at him."

However, Romm made no such attempt. Later in the day, as Zhik subsequently reported to Hok, Zhik watched him rise and tramp glumly away. Zhik followed Romm stealthily, for the brother of Hok was not one to give up the project of killing someone he disliked; he wanted the roan-head to get well out of the hunting lands and therefore away from any lingering impulse in Hok to spare him. Later Zhik would overtake the fellow, goad him into drawing axe or dagger, and fight it out to a grim finish.

But just at sunset, the thing became impracticable. For Zhik, rounding a thicket, saw a half dozen Gnorrls come trotting from the north to meet Romm. And they did not attack him—they hailed him with gestures of clumsy respect, they came close and fell on their faces before him, even as scouts of the tribe had seen them grovel before the red sun at rising. Finally they went

away together—Romm and the Gnorrls—as friends and allies.

All this Zhik reported to Hok, who digested and rationalized it:

"Romm, then, has joined the beast-men. He has become their chief, and they worship him; perhaps his red hair makes them think he is from the sun." Hok spat. "A man joining the Gnorrls! It is more disgusting than Gnorrls alone."

"And he saved your life only to discredit you before the men of our camp," contributed Zhik. "Thus we others would be more easily beaten. I still want to come within knife-stroke of him."

"Such a chance may still come," smiled Hok. "Romm plays some long game with us—something beyond killing us for the sake of his Gnorrl friends. But so far he has found the playing rough. In time to come it may be rougher still."

As usual, he spoke with chief-tainly confidence; but his big, brave heart was full of wonder and meditation.

Chapter III The New Weapon

On the third day after his contest with Romm, Hok sat by a small tallow-lamp in the rear of his cave, the place where he retired for meditation and experimentation. The wise Oloana, knowing her husband's preoccupied mood so well, warned all to leave him alone.

He was examining the cord he had taken from Romm's belt-bag, twisting and twining and pulling it. Earlier he had tried to use it as Romm had, with very indifferent success—it would take long practice to learn the art. But the principle of shaft-spinning was manifest to him, and he determined to achieve or improve upon it.

"What that boastful wanderer could do, Hok can do better," he told himself with utmost confidence. "He was not so strong as I, but the cord strengthened him. It is like the throwing stick of the Gnorrls, who can send a stone farther than it can be thrown by hand—they split a stick, push the stone in, and whirl it as though with an arm twice lengthened."

The thought of a stick as a throwing device impelled him to poke among the weapon materials in a nearby corner. He fetched forth a long, straight piece of hickory that he had cut months ago to make a javelin shaft. It was nearly as long as himself, two fingers thick at the mid-point where the balance would be, and the two ends tapered somewhat by long and judicious scraping with rough flint. He tested it by careful bending—it had springy strength, and in the hands of a Gnorrl it would make an ideal stick for stone-throwing. He looked from it to the cord, and back again.

"Romm uses a cord, the Gnorrls use wood, to make their casts long," he muttered. "I, who wish to outdo them both, might use wood and cord as well. How?"

He tied a noose in the cord and drew it tight over one end of the shaft. Lodging the butt of the hickory in a crack of the rocky floor, he pulled at the cord. The tough wood bent slowly and unwillingly. Hok pondered, then nodded to himself. A stone—yes, or a javelin—fastened somehow to this cord, would be whipped strongly forward at will. He carried the device outdoors and to the meadow behind the settlement where, unobserved, he could test and judge.

Driving him on with his experiments was the submerged, only half-conscious fear of what Zhik had told him—of Romm and the Gnorrls. Hok hardly knew he was looking for a weapon. He only knew he was working on something.

His experiments with stones and wooden splinters were clumsy, but they gave him something to think about. When after repeated tuggings, he broke Romm's cord, he returned to his cave for another, longer and thicker. This he knotted to one end of the stick, pulling at it in various manners.

The power was there, he knew, but he was still at a loss as to how it could be used. Finally, partially by chance and partially

by half-formed inspiration, he drew the wood into an arc and made another noose in the cord with which to catch and hold the free end.

He now had a tense figure of wood and buckskin, that would hold its shape even when he laid it by itself upon the snow. Turning the thing over, he tested its tough elasticity by drawing upon the cord. The bent bar of hickory was like a flexed muscle, ready to strike or shove.

But still he was perplexed. He had started with a cord like Romm's, a stick like the Gnorrl throwing-tool, and had evolved something vastly different from either. As he frowned and pondered, movement rustled at his elbow. A small, firm hand came into view, with a round rod of wood. With this it plucked at the tight-drawn cord. A humming sound responded, like that of bees.

"It sings," came the voice of Ptao, Hok's small son. Serious blue eyes regarded the strange engine from under a shock of straw-yellow hair. Again Ptao plucked the taut cord with the haft of his toy spear, drawing it back and bending the bow a trifle. The strength of the hickory was too much for his young muscles, and it almost snapped the stick out of his hand.

At once Hok built upon his new ideas with still another.

"Let me see that little spear, my son," he said, and the lad trustfully handed over his toy. Hok had whittled it days ago from a shoot of ash, too small for a real javelin, and it was a faithful model of real weapons. The point had been made as sharp as a wasp-sting, and hardened judiciously in the fire.

Hok used the butt as Ptao had done, to evoke musical humming from the tight-drawn string. He pushed harder with it, carrying the string backward and bending the hickory length into a deeper arc. The suddenly he let go, and with a whispering *thung* and a whack the toy flew some feet away. Ptao, light on his little moccasined feet sped in pursuit and brought the thing back to his father. Another try—another. And then Hok felt that he knew what might be done to make the work a success.

Drawing his flint knife, he scraped a notch in the butt of Ptao's little spear. This notch he used to catch the center of the cord, and clipped it there between the great fingers of his right hand. His left hand caught the wooden arc at the point where the balance would be on a javelin, and the forward end of the spear fell across and above his clenched fist. He held it in place with his forefinger, took a firm stance as though to throw. Then he lifted the device—and loosed.

With a great explosive whoop,

the cord snapped taut again. It drove Ptao's spear forward and away—away, away, as a swallow hurtles to escape a falcon. Hok, his left hand still clutching the machine of wood and buckskin, stared after the shaft, his lips parting in his beard with amazement.

"It speeds!" he gasped. "It speeds—straight, and more swiftly and far than any javelin—"

"Father!" cried Ptao, alarmed and disappointed. "My spear—look, it is lost, out of sight over there in that thicket!"

Hok's free hand dropped on Ptao's tousled head. "Do not grieve, my son. Tonight, I will cut you another and better little spear—yes, and some more, to throw with this new weapon—"

He broke off, gazing once more along the path of the missile.

"Boh!" he cried, in imitation of the sound his engine had made at the moment it straightened and threw the missile; and a new word came, along with a new weapon and a new force, into the world of men.

The next morning Hok went hunting, alone. He shot at everything he saw, from rabbits to snow-bogged elk, missing again and again and losing several of his new-made arrows; but his skill improved with the hours, and he brought back a doe and some grouse. After that he practices daily. He learned that the

little darts he made would split if launched against a hard target like a tree or stone—a misfortune, for a good arrow was a difficult to fashion as a bowstave; but he improved his workmanship, and fumbled in Oloana's sewing-kit for some gay red feather-fluff to tie upon the shafts and make them easier to find after shooting.

Thus Hok grew proficient with the new weapon he called a bow, but he laid it away, with his arrows tipped with skewer-like splinters of bone. The wood was too weak, the buckskin cord tended to stretch. He would return later, when he had more time, to fashion a better bow. There was work to be done now.

The spring was foreshadowed by thaws and rains. The first crocus blossoms, white and yellow and purple, thrust their hardy faces out of drifts, and Oloana twined them in her black cloud of hair, looking forward to lilies and violets. Willow scrub burst into little furry tufts, then into catkins. The snow-patches dwindled and the game herds fattened on tender grass, while the skeletal trees clothed themselves in leaves once more. The lad Ptao, diligently practicing with the new spear his father had made for him, brought down a north-winged raven, and the hunters foretold for him a career as a great hunter. It became warm, bright, one could travel in clout and

moccasins without winter's cumbersome fur mantles and leg-swathings.

Then the awful day dawned.

Chapter IV

The Triumph of the Beast-Men

Hok had guessed that the Gnorrls would try something—one or two of their people had been killed by his hunters during the cold weather, and that meant attempts at revenge. The mystifying factor was Romm, wise and wicked and spiteful, who would incite and direct them. Hok kept a pair of scouts on the plains north of his settlement, and one morning those scouts came home in a breathless scamper. Sure enough, Gnorrls were coming—many of them, and very purposefully.

Hok gave orders swiftly. The Gnorrls always lived and moved in larger groups than true men, but their organization was clumsy. They made a line, continuous but open. That line began to move forward at a steady lumbering trot. When it had moved well out, there formed and set out a second line, and then a third. Behind the third wave more Gnorrls bunched into clumps, as though to act as a reserve, rushing to whatever point the battle would develop.

"See!" growled Zhik. "Did I deceive you? More Gnorrls than we thought possible—and better

armed—and wiser led! Hok, it is in my mind that this may be our last fight!"

Hok was thinking the same thought, and he resolutely put it from him. From the armful of javelins spread at his feet, he caught up one and set himself for the throw.

"Ready, all!" he thundered for his warriors to hear. "When they come within range, I will throw—do the same, each of you! Let this be a fight for the Gnorrls to remember all of their days!"

From the valley came cadenced howls and jabbers—the Gnorrls, too, were receiving orders from their war-chiefs. One such chief pushed ahead of the line, and Hok, watching him draw into range, whipped forward the first javelin of the fight. It struck his quarry full in the midriff. The Gnorrl chieftain fell, but his followers tramped unhesitatingly forward over the ground spattered with his blood.

Hok's men went into action the next moment. Every one of them was strong of arm, deadly of aim—few, if any, of that rain of javelins went wide of the mark. The Gnorrls fell like leaves in a gale. But there were more Gnorrls than javelins, and they did not falter in their advance. The gaps in the front were filled from the lines and groups behind.

"Back to the rocks!" yelled Hok, and followed his men there. They had placed other sheafs of

javelins ready behind the ram-parts, and began to hurl these. The range was point-blank now, the oncoming mass of Gnorrls so close that the defenders could see the glaring eyes and snarling fangs of their foemen. Hok's party was doing deadly execution—for a moment, Hok dared hope that even this mighty mass of enmity could be broken, driven back.

Fleeting, he thought of his bow, but it was too imperfect and there was only one. There was only this chance—

But, even as the hope dawned, Zhik was tugging at his elbow. "They are behind us!"

Hok turned, and saw. Another great cloud of Gnorrls, in open order, was bearing down from the left, moving to flank them and hem them in. Hok swore agonizedly.

"Retreat!" he thundered at the top of his lungs. "Throw all your javelins—quickly—and get out of here!"

He was almost too late. The charge from the front had come up to the barrier of rocks. For the moment, retreat was out of the question—men must fight, and desperately, with axe and club and stabbing-spear, to win free. Moments, precious moments that might score the difference between life and death, were eaten up in that hand-to-hand struggle.

Then Hok's force rolled back, leaving half a dozen dead behind—yes, and wounded too, pain-racked hunters to be clubbed and trampled by the Gnorrls. The reserve party of youths was trying to stem the flanking movement, and very unsuccessfully; for those Gnorrls had spears, and could throw them. They replied to the volleys of the young warriors, and several Gnorrl casts found their mark. With throaty war-cries, the attackers hurled their lumpy bodies into the fray.

The met Hok as he and his first line of defense found time to turn and run back. Before he could do otherwise, Hok grappled a grizzelpelted Gnorrl in the forefront of the flanking horde.

The beast-man's ungainly, lump-thewed arms clamped about him, and Hok knew a moment of revulsion comparable to that which rises upon touching a snake . . . the very disgust gave him strength to tear the creature from him, slam it to earth and split the ridged skull with a downward sweep of his axe. Smoking blood and brains spurted forth to drench him. He was up and chivying his demoralized followers into a faster flight.

They distanced the pursuit for a time, then slowed up as Hok made a stand while Zhik and two other swift runners raced ahead to break up the camp—against such a whole generation of battling Gnorrls as this, not even

the home stronghold could stand.

Again the people of the river-side retreated, but perforce more slowly. They had to fight the foremost Gnorrls now and turn them back, so that the women could gain a start to southward, carrying the youngest children and leading those who could toddle.

It was a day to remember, all through the lives of those who survived it—a day to remember in nightmare visions.

Mercifully, the Gnorrls broke their early disciplined ranks, in their eagerness to overtake and kill. Thus, turning to defend the surviving warriors had only the swift-running vanguard of the enemy to meet—they were not too crushingly outnumbered. Thundering his wild war-cry, Hok actually ran to meet a leader of the Gnorrls, caught upon the haft of his stabbing-spear the terrific downward smash of a flint-headed club.

The blow broke his own weapon in two, but he flailed with the ragged end of the wood at the Gnorrl's face, made it yelp and give back; then, stooping quickly, he caught up the fallen piece with the spear-head and drove it like a dagger between the thick ribs of the thing's chest. For the sake of defiance, and to put heart into his own fellows, he sprang upon the floundering body and roared anew his challenge and triumph. But the moment was brief—the Gnorrl next closest threw its jave-

lin, which swished past Hok's elbow and pierced the warrior just behind him.

Another flurry of hand-to-hand combat, with death on both sides. Zhik, white-lipped and fire-eyed, grappled a Gnorrl chieftain like a giant hairy frog, and the powerful monster tripped him and fell upon him. Hok ran in and brained the Gnorrl as it wrestled uppermost, then caught his brother's hand and jerked him to his feet. After that, the great press of pursuing Gnorrls caught up, and again the men must run, to catch up with their women, form and defend again.

By late afternoon they were far south of their camp. In the evening they came to a stream, a tributary of their own river, swollen by spring rains into a churning muddy flood.

None of the surviving tribesmen, faint with running and fighting and horror, wanted to attempt that crossing. But Hok, glancing back to where the leading Gnorrls were closing in once more, forced them to it.

He hurled in some of the big children himself, poking them along with the butt of his axe until, crying in terror, they struck out for the opposite shore. Their mothers followed perforce, and then the rest of the women. Hok swam across, encouraging and harrying, lending a hand here and there to weak paddlers who

might go under or be swept away by the freshet; then, even though his mighty thews were agonizedly tired, he made his way back to fight the rearguard action on the other bank. It was the last clash of the day, and the bloodiest. Gnorrls died. So did men; and only a handful of survivors were able to slip away, when darkness came and none could throw spears or clubs or stones after them as they strove in the water.

The Gnorrls, poor swimmers, made their campfires on the brink of the stream. Hok marshalled the remnant of his people and took them far away, until darkness was so thick that they could not see to walk or guess the way. Then, by the light of a little fire under the lee of a hill, he counted noses.

There were not many to count. Of his thirty warriors, eight still answered to their names—every one a peerless fighter even against Gnorrls, every one wounded in several places. But now, Zhik was the only one whose eye shone fearlessly. The fifteen boys who had sallied forth with hopes of glory that morning were now but nine, and not a one of them but wept in forgetfulness of any ambition to be a warrior. Barp and Unn, Hok's young brothers, were both dead, cut down in the attempt to turn back the flanking party of the Gnorrls at the first encounter. Of the women, most had escaped—

only a few sick and old had been cut off at the camp—and a good number of the children.

Hok's heavy heart lifted a little as his son Ptao came wearily to him and smiled a filial welcome. And Oloana, too, was there, having killed four Gnorrls with her own hand. Now 'she brought green leaves to patch the dozen cuts and slashes upon her husband's face and body, wounds he was now aware of for the first time.

Before dawn Hok had this stricken troop on the move southward. That day they saw the last of the hunting grounds they had so gloriously wrested from the Gnorrls years ago—driven, beaten, half obliterated, they were returning to the forests below, where game was scarce and rival hunters many. It was a doleful homecoming.

And the scouts on the rearward watch reported that the Gnorrls had not stopped following them.

Chapter V Two Against The Gnorrls

Eight days had passed, and the ninth was darkening into the night. Five chiefs of the southern forest clans sat around the council fire Hok had made in a pine-circled clearing, and soberly disagreed with him; for in their eyes he was no longer Hok the Mighty, ruler and cham-

pion of the folk who held those good northern huntings—he was a beaten fighter, with his following cut to pieces, and in his retreat he had brought the Gnorrls south, further south than any living man had ever known them to come.

"The watchers say that they are as many as autumn leaves in a gale," said Zorr, the father of Oloana, squatting opposite Hok at the head of his young warriors. "It is best, perhaps, that we parley with them."

"Parley!" repeated Hok, as one who does not believe his ears. "As well parley with wolves, with boars, as with the Gnorrl. You all know that."

"But this man Romm is their chief," said a fellow named Kemba, scratching himself. "He can be reasoned with. As a matter of fact, Hok," and Kemba's voice took on a cunning note, "I think it is your blood he is after, not ours. What do the other chiefs think?"

All applauded save Zorr, who was not anxious to desert his son-in-law. Hok, still stiff with weariness and wounds, rose and glared around, his nostrils expanded like a horse's. He hefted his war-axe of flint, on the blade and handle of which the blood of a dozen Gnorrls had dried.

"I say, fight to the death," he snapped. "Who says the same?"

"I!" barked Zhik, and rose to stand beside his brother. A few

more rose, in the rearward quarters where the subordinate warriors sat. Hok counted them, and they were his own veterans, fresh from the awful conflict and still scabbed over with wounds, but ready for all that to follow him into more games with death. One or two of the southern fighters rose with them, but none of the chiefs. Kemba sneered at Hok; he would not have dared to sneer a season ago.

"You have our leave to head back to the north and fight," he said. "After all, it is your quarrel, not ours. We have never had to fight the Gnorrls."

"Because I stood between you and them!" Hok almost roared. "Kemba, if this were an ordinary matter, I would kill you for the way you talk. But there is not time or strength among us for a battle, save with the Gnorrls." He put out an appealing hand toward Zorr. "Hark you, father of my wife! I am not afraid to die—but what will become of Oloana? What of Ptao, the son of your daughter? Romm and his Gnorrls will not spare them."

Zorr's grizzled black beard quivered, but he shook his head slowly. "There must be a vote of the chiefs, and we must both bide by that vote," he reminded heavily.

"Listen to me," said Hok. "I have a new weapon. It is a thing of strong wood and buckskin, and with it I can hurl small javelins a great distance. With this

weapon—if all our warriors learn to use it—we can drive back the cursed Gnorrls—”

“Would it take long to learn to use this—ah—strange weapon of which you speak?” a crafty-looking old man asked.

“Not long. Perhaps ten days. But until then we would have to fight them off with the weapons we now have.”

The crafty-faced one smiled. “In ten days perhaps none here would be alive,” he said. “It would be wiser to parley. I will not listen to madness.”

“Listen, this once!” Hok roared then. “Listen, before voting—I offer myself as a single warrior against the Gnorrls.

Even the crafty-faced one fell silent after that, only exchanging sharp glances with the other chiefs squatting about the council fire.

Then as the silence lengthened and still no one spoke, Hok stood up with a grim smile. “Agreed then,” he said and stalked off to get ready for the dawn.

Just before first light, as he was gliding swiftly through the gray-lit forest north of the encampment, Hok’s keen eyes found the track that could only have been made by a Gnorrl. So they had come this far, even among the trees, to spy him out.

Leaning close to the ground, his quick ear caught a noise—

pit-pat, pit-pat. Two feet approached, near at hand and behind; another human being moved on his trail. Even as he listened the noise ceased, as though the pursuer listened for him in turn.

Hok dodged sharply around some bushes. With a sudden flexure and jerk, he strung his huge bow, and upon the string notched an arrow. If this was the Gnorrl who had made the track, its pursuit of him would be short and tragic. His eyes found an opening among the bushes, and to this he drew his shaft, tense and ready to drive murderously home.

A body, stealthy and active, moved into his line of vision. Hok’s fingers trembled on the verge of releasing the cord, then he suddenly relaxed his archer’s stance and sprang through the bushes with a whoop.

“Oloana!” he cried; and his wife faced him, startled but radiant.

Her fine, strong body was clad in leopard fur, in her girdle she carried a short axe and dagger. Her hand bore one javelin while a second swung in a shoulder loop. On her feet were stout traveling moccasins, and the pouch at her side bulged as with provisions for a journey.

“I have overtaken you,” she said breathlessly. “Which way do we go?”

Hok’s tawny head shook emphatically. “You must return to

the camp," he told her. "I face the Gnorrls alone."

"I am coming with you," she replied, as definitely as he.

"I forbid it." His bearded face was stern. "Your place is with the tribe, or what is left of it—"

"You made over the command to Zhik," she reminded him.

"Ptao is there—you should remain with him—"

"Ptao is a well-grown boy. You were not many years older than he when you became a chief. And you left him, too, in Zhik's care. I heard."

He tried yet again: "If I die, Oloana—what if I die?"

She gestured the words out of his mouth. "If you die, Hok, am I to remain alive? Be a wood-carrier for my father, or—perhaps—marry for softness' sake, a man who is but the quarter of your shadow? I am your wife. I do not intend to be your widow. If you die, then I shall die, too."

And now Hok fell silent, letting her finish her argument.

"You are one pair of eyes, one pair of hands, against all those Gnorrls," she summed up. "Let me be your helper—watch in the other direction, strike a blow to defend your back. If one fighter has a chance to conquer, two might have a double chance. You are the chief—I am the chief-tainess!"

Determination had come back into Hok's heart, and now joy followed it and swelled through him.

HOK DRAWS THE BOW

He laughed aloud, and caught Oloana in his arms, hugging her with a sudden fierceness that squeezed the last gasp of breath out of her. Then he motioned toward the open country.

"Come then, woman. Hail The Gnorrls do not know what misfortune is marching upon them!"

Chapter VI The Deceit of Romm

They camped that night on the stream that had saved their people from complete ruin, and it took them all the next day to re-traverse the ground they had lost in a single afternoon of running battle. Hok had a thought that made him grimace wryly—those Gnorrls made one travel fast!

Four times during the hours of light they lay flat in brushy clumps or among high heather while patrols—not mere groups, but patrols of Gnorrls moved by, in one direction or the other. Hok, who could appreciate organized reconaissance, saw at once that this must be an important piece of Romm's work. The scouting Gnorrls travelled in half-dozens, with one active fellow moving well in front and two more some paces to the right and left as flankers.

The leader and a subordinate held the central position, chattering orders, and at the rear point moved a "get-away" Gnorrl

who could scuttle back and warn his comrades if the rest were surprised and struck down. Gazing at these bands, Hok's eye gleamed hardly and his fingers plucked longingly at the string of his bow; but he sent no arrows. He was not seeking the blood of a Gnorrl, but of Romm.

In the evening they camped, fireless, in a thicket not far below their old fort-village. At sundown they heard distant howling and jabbering, from many hairy throats—the Gnorrls were worshipping the sun as it set. But when the last red ray had faded on the horizon, the clamor rose even higher. Why? Then Hok remembered that the beast-men had been seen bowing before Romm, the roan-headed. Romm would find such adoration glorious, but Hok could not think of it without spitting.

Anyway, that crude, harsh litany told him what he wanted. The main body was close at hand, while the observers and raiding groups were all to the south, combing the open country between here and the forest. Perhaps he had come just in time—the Gnorrls would be on the point of a concerted move toward the forest and the final defense position of his own people. Two days' march would take them there—but meanwhile, they would expect no enemies this close to the heart of their main body.

His early plan took even more definite form. He whispered to Oloana:

"No wild beasts will threaten, with so many Gnorrls about—and no Gnorrl will move abroad in the dark. I will leave you here. Sleep lightly, with your hand upon your javelin. If I do not return before sunrise, go back southward."

Her hand found his in the night, her mouth kissed the side of his face. Then he moved stealthily out of the thicket, and along the way northward. The voices of the Gnorrls were guide enough.

He carried his strung bow in his left hand, with arrow notched and kept in place by his forefinger. At his right hip, within quick snatch of his free hand hung both his axe and his dagger. His mocasins made no noise on the earth, for Hok was night-born and did not need to grope his way.

A little shred of new moon rose, showing him his river, the bluffs and, as he drew near, great sleeping encampments of the enemy. He pressed close to the river to avoid these and so come undiscovered to the waterside shelf that gave narrow ingress to the hidden beach where his clan had once lived happily.

Toward the outward approach of that shelf he made his way, but paused. The wind blew downstream, and toward him. His dis-

tended nostrils caught the musky odor of Gnorri—alive and close at hand. A sentinel bode there, proof enough that something of importance lay beyond. The something of importance would be Romm, and the Gnorri chiefs who would make up his retinue and command-staff.

Hok came close to the rocks, pressed his big, supply body against them, and gingerly peered around the corner with one eye. There was light enough to see the guard—a big young Gnorri, standing up to block the way, but quite evidently sleepy. The creature leaned its burly shagginess against the side of the runway, and supported itself with the butt of its javelin—weariness brought stupidity, Hok knew.

The lone adventurer drew back, unstrung his bow, pouched his arrow, and slung them both behind him. Instead he took his stabbing-spear in both hands, and again moved close to the entrance of the runway. The Gnorri was within leaping reach.

Hok peered, gauged positions, distances, and above all the exact spot where the brute's wide, chinless jaw merged into the bull-neck. Then, with the smooth swiftness of a huge cat, he sprang from shelter and forward, his spear darting ahead of him and thrusting home, with all of his weight and force behind it.

The dull eyes of the Gnorri opened, the slab-lipped mouth

gaped; but then the flint point found its mark—the hairy protuberance in the center of the broad gullet, which was come to be called the Adam's apple. The spearhead split that lump of cartilage and killed the warning cry before it could be voiced.

Driven on by Hok's grim charge, the spear drove through windpipe, muscle, the bone and marrow of the spine at the back. Down flopped the slackening bulk of the sentry, and Hok, planting his moccasin-sole on the shaggy breast, wrenched his spear free. A lunging kick sent the carcass from the edge of the runway and into the quiet fast flow of the river.

Again Hok paused, listened and sniffed. No other guard waited at the far end of the passage, and he continued along it. Beyond, the light was better and he could see the sandy space where once had been gathered his people's homes and possessions.

But the huts were torn down now, lying in ruins. The level sand, once as clean and smooth as the cave-wives could make it, was foul with the remains of cooking-fires, heaps and scatterings of spoiled food, kindling, and all other untidiness of the Gnorris. It was strewn, too, with sleeping figures, who sprawled and snored grumbly—the chief individuals of the great Gnorri invasion that lay bivouacked on the nearby plains.

As he hoped, none had been astir save the guard he had dealt with just now. And there was but one fire—up above his head, just within the wide mouth of the grotto he once had inhabited.

Delicate-footed as a stalking wildcat for all his size and weight, Hok picked his way among the sleepers. One of them he had to step across, at the foot of the slanting pathway to the grotto, and even as he bestrode this figure it moved and moaned as in a dream. Hok froze tensely, his blood-drenched spearhead dangling within a hand's breadth of the open mouth; but then the Gnorrl subsided into deeper slumber, and Hok passed on. Like a blond shadow he stole up to the floor-level of the grotto and gazed in.

The fire was small but bright, made with pine knots; and before it sat a single figure, back toward him. Hok saw a shock of hair the color of a sky at sunset, protruding above a wolf-skin robe that seemed to be drawn across humped shoulders to fend off the night's chill.

Romm!

Here was the settlement of old scores, the defeat of the Gnorrls, literally within stabbing distance of him. Romm, living, had brought about this dire invasion, this threat to the very life of the human race; Romm, dead, would mean the crumbling of the

top-heavy Gnorrl army, its return to a mere unpleasant and solvable problem. Hok's hands tightened on his spear-shaft, and he moved forward, upon the floor of the grotto. A rush, a stab—and away up the path to the top of the bluff, a dash through the sleeping hosts, and back to Oloana in triumph!

His left moccasin took a long stride forward, and with a smooth gliding shove he put the keen flint into the wolfskin, just where a spine should run between the shoulder blades. The seated form seemed to give his weapon no more resistance than an empty bladder, and it fell forward with his shove, into the fire. The red hair blazed up, into rank smoke. Hok clenched his teeth to keep from voicing an exultant cry of victory . . .

Then, between his own shoulders, a cold, sharp point set itself.

"Do not move, Hok," said a quiet, jeering voice he knew. "Being thought a god, I made that dummy so that my worshippers would think I never slept; wakening yonder in the shadows, I saw you attack what you thought was Romm. But Romm lives; and if you so much as breathe deeply, this knife will slide into your heart like a snake."

Chapter VII The Fire and the Arrow

Hok's first reaction, even before astonishment, was of chagrin—in his instant of success, he had been trapped like a big rabbit. That moment of self-denunciation kept him from moving, from whirling and trying to grapple Romm; and the same moment gave Romm himself the opportunity to make sure of his captive.

The roan-head must have held the knife in one hand and a noose of cord in the other. That noose now dropped over Hok's shoulders, jerked tight, and pinioned him. A half-hitch snapped around Hok's ankle, and he found himself thrown violently. Then Romm knelt upon his chest, the knife at his throat, while he finished the binding as to elbows, wrists and knees.

"You may sit up now," Romm granted at length, and Hok did so, glaring. Romm was quietly exultant, his eyes dancing in their close-set sockets, his teeth grinning like a red-squirrel's. The renegade ruler of the Gnorris examined Hok's weapons—the spear, the axe, the knife and finally the bow. "What is this thing?" he demanded.

"You pass yourself for a god among these beast-things," growled Hok. "A god should not ask for information."

Romm chuckled in his maddening way, rose to his feet and turned the unstrung stave this way and that. He studied the

notch, narrowed his eyes in an effort to gauge purposes, and finally tried to pull the string into place. Romm's lank arms, though sinewy, did not approach the strength needed to bend that stiff bar of yew. At length he tossed it into a corner. He had not bothered to pry into the otter-skin pouch which Hok still wore, filled with arrows.

"It looks like a fishing pole, badly made," he said. "Well, Hok, you fished for me, but it is you who have been hooked and landed." From the fire he dragged the remains of the dummy he had made to simulate himself—winter leggins stuffed with dried grass, a cross of sticks to support the draped mantle in life-like manner, and a gourd to which had been stuck, with balsam, tufts pulled from his own thick thatch.

"I made it to deceive the willing fools you call Gnorris," he laughed, "and it did more—it deceived even the wide and brave Hok, and so saved my life."

"Why do you not kill me?" challenged Hok.

"That will come later. Tomorrow the Gnorris must see you, bound and helpless. They will marvel more greatly at my power—thinking that my wisdom and magic snatched you, the one man they fear, from your hiding in the forest. And among us we will invent for you a death for all to

see, and in which a great proportion may share."

"Be sure of my death when you see me dead," warned Hok in the deeps of his chest, and Romm laughed the longer.

"You are bound, helpless, while I am content to wait for my revenge," he said, "and there is no reason for us to sleep the rest of this night. Let us talk—about me as a god and you as a doomed man."

The joyful commotion of the wakening Gnorrls offended the sunrise and the blue spring sky; for at dawn Romm had summoned their chiefs and shown them his prisoner, the giant they called the Slayer From Afar.

Hok's reputation and fierce skill had kept his people from being obliterated on the retreat short days ago; only the thought of him had dampened the enthusiasm of the marchers for a bold entry and showdown under the shadows of the trees. And now they had him.

Because Romm was at his side as he was pushed and dragged up the high trail to the meadow where once he had one a certain javelin-throwing, the Gnorrls did not at once fall on him and tear him to pieces. But Hok knew that death was staring him between the eyes, and that this time the stare would not falter.

Well, he thought with fierce philosophy, these foul beasts who

dared walk upright in grotesque semblance of man should see how a chief died. Meanwhile, his death here and now would stiffen the defense to the south—the vote of the chiefs had promised that. If Oloana could know that he was lost, and slip back to safety . . .

As if reading part of the thought, Romm spoke her name. "Do not be concerned for Oloana, your wife," he said, and smiled. "I myself shall comfort her for your loss."

Hok growled wordlessly, like a wolf, and it pleased Romm. "Yes, not all your people will die. I would be lonesome as one man, even though a god among the Gnorrls. The warriors will fall in battle, as they would wish. Such children as we capture can be reared and taught to obey me. And the women—a few—especially Oloana—"

Bound as he was, Hok sprang at him. It took the abhorrent hard hands of seven Gnorrls to hold him from knocking Romm down with the impact of his straining body, and for a moment the godly arrogance of the roan-head was tremblingly near a break. Only when Hok was thrust safely back did Romm find the note of mockery again. "Nothing you can do will save yourself, Hok—nor Oloana."

By that time Hok had gained his self-control back. His heart was white-hot within him, like a stone in the midst of a pit-



fire; but there was clarity of thought within him also, the determination to foresee and find and use the chance that must exist, however, slim, for a turning of the tables.

They had come to the middle of the meadow. Rich green grass showed through the higher patches of winter-killed weeds and cane, and to north and south ran thicket-like belts of brush. Where Hok was halted, with uncountable Gnorrls swarming close in great hairy droves and knots, some of the horde were planting a great upright pole. Around about the beast-people blackened the level space for two javelin-flights in every direction, and the bright air grew heavy with the foul scent of them.

Hok's guards pushed his back against the pole. Others bound him fast with two turns of raw-hide thong. One Gnorrl brought its knobby arms full of wood, which it arranged at Hok's feet.

Romm leaned on a staff—it was Hok's unstrung bow, that had so mystified him the night before. "You see the death I have planned?" he queried. "Slow fire—to roast, not burn... the Gnorrls believe that what they eat will give them its peculiar virtue. And so, when you are roasted, these Gnorrls will eat you!"

He had stepped close, and the last words he flung out with his nose close to Hok's. The bound

man gazed in disgust at Romm; and deliberately, as one who reckons with the results of his action, he spat in the renegade's face.

Every Gnorrl roared furiously, the whole of them as with one earth-shaking voice. There was a rush from all sides, but Romm flung up his arms and barked a single commanding syllable. The beast-men gave back grumpily, and Romm wiped the spittle from his flushed face. Then his toothy grin returned. Slowly he shook his head.

"It will not work," he said, in a voice like water under ice. "My friends here almost did as you hoped—tore you to pieces quickly and mercifully. But no. You will roast."

Hok let his gaze wander past Romm. He was bound so that his face turned south, toward the thicket where he had left Oloana. Many broad, brutal faces, with blue lips and chinless jaws and shaggy bodies, ranged before him to watch his miserable death. Beyond them was the green and brown of the meadow grass, more distant clumps and... yes... Oloana. That was her head, thrusting craftily out of some willows...

With a glowing coal of dead wood, Romm was igniting the fuel heaped at Hok's feet. Smoke rose, then a licking tongue of flame that scorched the captive's shank, mounted higher and

singed the lion's skin he wore. The end was upon him . . . and Oloana was in the open, moving behind the backs of the intent Gnorrls, well within fair javelin range.

"Oloana!" Hok roared, suddenly and at the top of his great lungs "Throw a javelin—kill me! Then run!"

And she threw it. The shaft sang and shone in the air, came coasting over the heads of the Gnorrls, past the bending back of Romm, and struck—not Hok, but the stake to which he was tied, just beside his flank.

On the instant, Romm straightened and whirled. He, and every chattering Gnorrl saw Oloana, poisoning her other javelin.

Pointing, the roan-head bellowed orders to his Gnorrls. It was as though Hok could understand perfectly; he was urging his followers to rush after the woman he coveted, capture her and bring her unhurt to him. Like a stampeding herd of cattle, the Gnorrl pack dashed past and away from the bound man at the burning stake, and in his eagerness for Oloana, Romm ran with them.

Even before they had left him, Hok was alone, forgotten in the chase. He stiffened himself against the bite of the rising flame, and the wedged javelin-point rasped his ribs. Into his mind came inspired hope.

Writhing hard to the other side

he drew the rawhide that held him as taut as he could. A strand of it fell across the sharp edge of the javelin's head. The burning fire quickened his struggles and jerks. Rasped and stretched, the cord frayed, then parted. Another floundering heave, and Hok fell free, still bound as to hands and feet, but away from the fire.

His wrists he lifted to his mouth tearing with his strong teeth at the confining leather. A thought's space more and that, too, parted. Then he was freeing his feet and knees, and stood erect.

Oloana had thrown her second javelin at Romm, and had missed—the shaft quivered in the earth, not a dozen paces from where Hok stood, and Romm raged in the midst of his great yelling cloud of Gnorrls. Hok saw his wife running beyond—not fast enough. She might distance the clumsy beast-folk, but not Romm.

He still felt fire; the otter-skin quiver, which had gone to the stake behind his hip, was ablaze, together with the arrows it held. He tore the thing from him, dropped it. Within reach of his hand lay his bow—Romm had laid it down to kindle the fire.

No time to lose; Hok's brain did a lurid sum in addition. Oloana fled, the Gnorrls pursued, and he had the bow and flaming arrows. Could he?—Snatching up the yew staff, he bent and strung it. From the smouldering

quiver he whipped a straight arrow, that sprouted fire like a blossom. With a quick drawing pluck, he pulled the shaft to its burning head, and sped it away—neither at Oloana nor at the Gnorrls, but at the ground between them.

It sang up through the air, then down. It dived into a shaggy bunch of reedy grass, killed by this winter but still standing, just as Oloana cleared that very spot. And the grass tore up in flames, bounding high and fierce.

The foremost Gnorrls cowered back. To them it was as if that fire had leaped magically from earth's heart.

Then, as if in beneficent alliance with Hok in his lone fight against myriads, breeze rose from the south and hurled the greatening fire in a charging sheet upon the army of the Gnorrls.

Chapter VIII The Death of a God

Hok had only half hoped for such a result of his shot; but, seeing the leap and rush of the fire he saw and knew the chance that had come to him. He caught up other arrows, still burning, and sent them skimming away, to kindle other blazes in a line with the first. Before the Gnorrls could recover their initial panic and divide to dash around the first small grass-fire after Oloana,

he had made a burning fence between her and them—a fence that rose high and hot from several different points, and moved menacingly upon the shaggy host.

The Gnorrls retreated, and so did Romm. Hok, cut off from his wife by both Gnorrls and fire, ran, too—faster than any. He gained the top of a rise where the grass grew shorter, and felt that he had time to pause. He looked back.

At a good four ten-tens of paces, Romm had halted his hosts. They stood in their tracks, clumped around him, although the rising conflagration pressed close behind them. Why did Romm do this suicidal thing? ... but as Hok asked himself that, the answer became clear. The renegade was kneeling, to twirl something between his hands—a fire-stick! That was it, Romm was making fire, with a hard wood spindle on a soft slab—fire in front of him, when at his back was a blaze like a forest of glowing heat!

Hok's mystified scowl faded, for he knew Romm's intention. The same wind that brought burning death upon the Gnorrls from the south would carry this new fire ahead of them, giving them a burned-off refuge. Hok leaped up and down upon his knoll, and bawled at the top of his lungs:

"Romm! I am free—free! I am going to kill you!"

Not until that moment had Romm realized that his prisoner was escaping. He straightened quickly, yelled a reply that Hok could not catch, then seized a javelin and rapidly wound it with his cord. With an explosive jerk he sped the weapon at Hok—it fell many paces short, and Hok laughed his loudest. Romm made a gesture of helpless disgust, then dropped to his knees and resumed his fire-making.

Hok had one arrow left. The fire had gone out on its bone-shod tip. Putting it to the string, he planted his feet, clamped the arrow-butt between his grasping fingers, and drew with all his strength. For a moment he paused with bow at full bend, gauging air currents, elevations, direction. He dared not miss . . . he let the arrow fly.

Romm never knew what death soared down out of the heavens. The darting shaft pierced him where his neck joined his shoulder, and drove on downward into his lungs. His throat filled with blood, he writhed upward from his knees to his feet, flourished his arms in frantic agony, and slammed down upon his face. He never moved again.

Hok, gazing, heard the voices of the Gnorrls. They jabbered in a way he recognized—it was the worship-clamor. The ugly monsters still stood where Romm had halted them, though the fire had

come almost to their shoulders. Their arms extended toward him, Hok. Their guttural cries were addressed to him.

They were worshipping Hok, as they had worshipped Romm. The enemy who had slain their red god was greater—they turned to him now, with their prayers and terrors. They pleaded for deliverance from the fire.

But Hok yelled again, to curse them. As if invoked by his curse, the fire suddenly whipped to greater and swifter banners of heat. It charged in among the Gnorrls, scorching and singeing. The things screamed in a way to deafen all the world, and began to run.

The whole meadow, with its reed-tussocks and bush-clumps was flaming around them.

Hok ran, too, far in advance of them. He did not turn back to see the destruction of his enemies. Changing direction, he came to the bluffs above the river, and sprang far out. The water hurried up to meet him, received him and closed over his head. He drove deep down into its troubled depths, but up he came in a moment, swimming hard with his free hand and trailing the bow behind him.

The current carried him quickly past the old beach where his folk had once camped and which lately had been the sleeping-ground of the Gnorrl chief. It was ablaze now, all the refuse and grass-

bedding and trash having caught fire from sparks above. Below it the river widened and the current slowed; or the shore, the grass showed untouched by flame. Hok fought his way to the shallows, then to the water-side. Oloana came running to meet him.

"You are safe," she panted. "Yes—and you still have that thing you call a bow."

"It must dry carefully," replied Hok, for it has stood our good friend this day. Tomorrow I shall cut new arrows for it."

That night they made their beds on the sand of the fire-purged beach. Nothing but ashes remained of the enemy camp, and the day of heat had cleared the air of Gnorrl-scent. Far away to the north, the dark sky was lurid with the still-marching flames.

"How many Gnorrls came alive out of that business?" wondered Oloana.

"Few, very few," answered Hok. "There are, of course, scouting parties south of here. We will avoid them on the way back, and lead warriors to surprise and swallow them. I doubt

if the Gnorrls will have the numbers or courage to look us in the face for many years. And then we will have our bows."

"And we have our home again," rejoiced Oloana, like the good housewife she was. "A few hours will rebuild the huts—and people from the south will strengthen our numbers more than ever—"

She broke off and gazed anxiously at her husband. "Hok!" she cried. "What is the matter?"

For he, chief and champion and conqueror, sat with his bearded face in his big hands. He shed the first tears his eyes had known since childhood. His body shook with great, racking sobs.

"Oh, the young men of our people who have died because Romm would be worshipped by the beast-people!" he mourned brokenly. "Oh, my two young brothers, Barp and Unn—and the brothers of all the rest, brave men, good men, who live no more! How can all the hunters of all the southern forests ever fill their places?"

The End

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BESIDE STILL WATERS

BY ROBERT SHECKLEY

Most of us like a Sheckley story because ever since the early 50's—when his first work began appearing almost everywhere in the field—we've developed a taste for his special kind of wit, ingenuity and polished story-telling, qualities you've hailed here in Fantastic.—See "Wild Talents, Inc." (November, 1965) and "What a Man Believes" (January, 1966).—But to show that such generalizations don't always hold true, here's a fine—and memorable—Sheckley short in which the famed wit gives way to a touch of pathos for a lonely old prospector dying somewhere in the asteroid belt.

MARK ROGERS was a prospector, and he went to the asteroid belt looking for radioactives and rare metals. He searched for years, never finding much, hopping from fragment to fragment. After a time he settled on a slab of rock half a mile thick.

Rogers had been born old, and he didn't age much past a point. His face was white with the pallor of space, and his hands shook a

little. He called his slab of rock Martha, after no girl he had ever known.

He made a little strike, enough to equip Martha with an air pump and a shack, a few tons of dirt and some water tanks, and a robot. Then he settled back and watched the stars.

The robot he bought was a standard-model all-around worker, with built-in memory and a thirty-word vocabulary. Mark

added to that, bit by bit. He was something of a tinkerer, and he enjoyed adapting his environment to himself.

At first, all the robot could say was "Yes sir," and "No sir." He could state simple problems: "The air pump is laboring, sir." "The corn is budding, sir." He could perform a satisfactory salutation: "Good morning, sir."

Mark changed that. He eliminated the "sirs" from the robot's vocabulary; equality was the rule on Mark's hunk of rock. Then he dubbed the robot Charles, after a father he had never known.

As the years passed, the air pump began to labor a little as it converted the oxygen in the planetoid's rock into a breathable atmosphere. The air seeped into space, and the pump worked a little harder, supplying more.

The crops continued to grow on the tamed black dirt of the planetoid. Looking up, Mark could see the sheer blackness of the river of space, the floating points of the stars. Around him, under him, overhead, masses of rock drifted, and sometimes the starlight glinted from their black sides. Occasionally, Mark caught a glimpse of Mars or Jupiter. Once he thought he saw Earth.

Mark began to tape new responses into Charles. He added simple responses to cue words. When he said, "How does it look?" Charles would answer,

"Oh, pretty good, I guess."

At first the answers were what Mark had been answering himself, in the long dialogue held over the years. But, slowly, he began to build a new personality into Charles.

Mark had always been suspicious and scornful of women. But for some reason he didn't tape the same suspicion into Charles. Charles' outlook was quite different.

"What do you think of girls?" Mark would ask, sitting on a packing case outside the shack, after the chores were done.

"Oh, I don't know. You have to find the right one." The robot would reply dutifully, repeating what had been put on its tape.

"I never saw a good one yet," Mark would say.

"Well, that's not fair. Perhaps you didn't look long enough. There's a girl in the world for every man."

"You're a romantic!" Mark would say scornfully. The robot would pause—a built-in pause—and chuckle a carefully constructed chuckle.

"I dreamed of a girl named Martha once," Charles would say. "Maybe if I would have looked, I would have found her."

And then it would be bedtime. Or perhaps Mark would want more conversation. "What do you think of girls?" he would ask



again, and the discussion would follow its same course.

Charles grew old. His limbs lost their flexibility, and some of his wiring started to corrode. Mark would spend hours keeping the robot in repair.

"You're getting rusty," he would cackle.

"You're not so young yourself," Charles would reply. He had an answer for almost everything. Nothing involved, but an answer.

It was always night on Martha, but Mark broke up his time into mornings, afternoons and evenings. Their life followed a simple routine. Breakfast, from vegetables and Mark's canned store. Then the robot would work in the fields, and the plants grew used to his touch. Mark would repair the pump, check the water supply, and straighten up the immaculate shack. Lunch, and the robot's chores were usually finished.

The two would sit on the packing case and watch the stars. They would talk until supper, and sometimes late into the endless night.

In time, Mark built more complicated conversations into Charles. He couldn't give the robot free choice, of course, but he managed a pretty close approximation of it. Slowly, Charles' personality emerged. But it was

strikingly different from Mark's.

Where Mark was querulous, Charles was calm. Mark was sardonic, Charles was naive. Mark was a cynic, Charles was an idealist. Mark was often sad; Charles was forever content.

And in time, Mark forgot he had built the answers into Charles. He accepted the robot as a friend, of about his own age. A friend of long years standing.

"The thing I don't understand," Mark would say, "is why a man like you wants to live here. I mean, it's all right for me. No one cares about me, and I never gave much of a damn about anyone. But why you?"

"Here I have a whole world," Charles would reply, "where on Earth I had to share with billions. I have the stars, bigger and brighter than on Earth. I have all space around me, close, like still waters. And I have you, Mark."

"Now, don't go getting sentimental on me —"

"I'm not. Friendship counts. Love was lost long ago, Mark. The love of a girl named Martha, whom neither of us ever met. And that's a pity. But friendship remains, and the eternal night."

"You're a bloody poet," Mark would say, half admiringly. "A poor poet."

Time passed unnoticed by the stars, and the air pump hissed

and clanked and leaked. Mark was fixing it constantly, but the air of Martha became increasingly rare. Although Charles labored in the fields, the crops, deprived of sufficient air, died.

Mark was tired now, and barely able to crawl around, even without the grip of gravity. He stayed in his bunk most of the time. Charles fed him as best he could, moving on rusty, creaking limbs.

"What do you think of girls?"

"I never saw a good one yet."

"Well, that's not fair."

Mark was too tired to see the end coming, and Charles wasn't interested. But the end was on its way. The air pump threatened to give out momentarily. There hadn't been any food for days.

"But why you?" Gasping in

the escaping air. Strangling.

"Here I have a whole world —"

"Don't get sentimental —"

"And the love of a girl named Martha." ~

From his bunk Mark saw the stars for the last time. Big, bigger than ever, endlessly floating in the still waters of space.

"The stars . . ." Mark said.

"Yes?"

"The sun?"

"— shall shine as now."

"A bloody poet."

"A poor poet."

"And girls?"

"I dreamed of a girl named Martha once. Maybe if —"

"What do you think of girls? And stars? And Earth?" And it was bedtime, this time forever.

Charles stood beside the body of his friend. He felt for a pulse once, and allowed the withered hand to fall. He walked to a corner of the shack and turned off the tired air pump.

The tape that Mark had prepared had a few cracked inches left to run. "I hope he finds his Martha," the robot croaked, and then the tape broke.

His rusted limbs would not bend, and he stood frozen, staring back at the naked stars. Then he bowed his head.

"The Lord is my shepherd," Charles said. "I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; he leadeth me . . ."



(Continued from page 41)

knees, as I noticed that I was being detained much longer than any of the others which had preceded me. I tried to push onward but the huge warrior grasped me gently with her mandibles, holding me firmly without hurting me. Meanwhile it was waving its antennae excitedly and two of the other soldier ants came running to see what was going on. They, too, inspected me in a way that suggested a suspicious uncertainty.

I realized that my position was a very critical one. Though their attitude was not exactly hostile, neither was it friendly. Had one of them taken a notion that I was an imposter, she would undoubtedly have attacked me without mercy, and I would have suffered the same fate as the hapless ant I had seen torn to pieces a few moments before.

With the small portion of human brain which I had inside my head, I tried to figure out some way to help myself. Suddenly an idea came to me. Quick as a flash, I regurgitated a droplet of honey from my crop and offered it to the nearest soldier. Apparently she was amenable to bribery, for she swallowed it greedily. In like manner, I paid my toll of "sugar" to the five other policemen and was allowed to pass unmolested.

Running along the tunnel for a short distance, I came to a side passageway terminating in a large

vaulted cavern. Here I found a large number of the smallest sized ants. They were busily engaged in macerating the leaf particles which they carried in from outside.

Perhaps you wonder how I was able to distinguish what the other ants were doing in the darkness of that subterranean chamber. I fully expected that I would be able to see in the dark, as some animals are supposed to do, but such was not the case. Instead I seemed to be guided almost entirely by my sense of smell. This was the most remarkable thing I noticed during my first day among the ants. Because my sense impressions have no parallel in human experience, they are very difficult to describe.

The only way I could explain it to myself was by analogy. It seemed as if I could perceive a series of clearly defined *images*, but instead of being made up of patches of light and color, these mind pictures were composed entirely of odors. With the aid of my organs of smell, which were located in the tips of my antennae, I was able to obtain what seemed to be very accurate "scent images" of all my surroundings, including the underground caverns, my fellow workers and the other occupants of the nest.

Not only was I able to smell out the presence of the things around me, but I was also forming dependable conclusions re-

garding their size, shape, and distance away from me. In the case of moving objects, I could easily tell how fast they were traveling and in what direction. Thanks to this remarkable ant faculty, I was able to learn of many things which otherwise would have escaped my observation.

One thing I observed is that there is just as much difference between individual ants as there is between different men. Due to the inability of the ordinary man to put himself in the place of an ant, we humans are prone to believe that all ants look exactly alike and behave exactly alike.

Nothing could be further from the truth. In my little colony of workers I found all sorts of types. There were no two which even remotely resembled each other in physiognomy. Conspicuous differences were also noticeable in their characters. There were ant flappers and ant prudes; there were intelligent ants and dumb ants, kind ants and cruel ants, brave ones and cowardly ones, generous ones and stingy ones, industrious ones and lazy ones.

The last named class were not at all numerous, to be sure. Most of the ants I met deserved the reputation which *all* ants have received for being hard workers. Nevertheless, there were a few slackers, even in my busy colony.

I shall never forget one of these

shirkers. I called her "Lazy Mary." She used to hang around the nest all day long. When she got hungry, she would approach one of the workers, coaxing with her antenna and begging for food. In this panhandling she was very successful. If the other ant had anything in her crop, she would invariably regurgitate a droplet and give it to Mary. Most of the ants were too busy themselves to notice that the little beggar wasn't doing any work. Once she came to me, soliciting food. I gave her a drop of honey from my crop, at the same time suggesting to her, by the motions of my antennae, that she could find food for herself if she would go and hunt for it.

She made a hateful face at me, sticking out her tongue and wiggling her gaster as if to say, "You mind your own business." Nevertheless she didn't ask me for any more honey after that.

Lazy Mary wasn't the only parasite in our nest, however. Much to my surprise I learned that our home was occupied by insects of other species who did not work themselves yet lived comfortably on food contributed by the good-natured worker ants. Some of these "Hobo Bugs", as I dubbed them, were about the same size as the ants but were quite different in structure. Their bodies were shaped like tiny carrots, with the tops rounded off. They had six legs apiece and their tails

were divided into three pointed segments.

The first time I saw one of these tramps obtain some food, I found it very amusing. As frequently happens, two worker ants met and proceeded to go through the formalities of regurgitation. Just as the droplet of food appeared on the tongue of one of them, Mister Hobo darted from his hiding place, sneaked under the heads of the ants and snatched the morsel right from under their noses. Strange to say, the ants paid no attention to the little sneak. With the idea of scaring it rather than trying to hurt it, I dashed after the hobo and made a grab for him with my mandibles. I found, however, that his tapering body was covered with hard, glossy scales, and he seemed to have no difficulty in slipping out of my grasp and scampering away.

Though the hoboies and the loafers were a bit annoying, the workers didn't seem to mind them. The ants had become resigned to the idea of tolerating the parasites. Fortunately we seemed to have plenty of food to give away.

It was some time before I found out where this abundant supply of food came from.

After I had wasted a few moments in watching the Hobo Bugs, I returned to my job of chopping up the leaf particles. The small "Home-Bodies" had al-

ready finished macerating a considerable amount of the leaf substance, which they had rolled into tiny balls and had spread out neatly in a smooth, flat bed.

I saw several of them quit and run further into the nest. To find out what they were going to do, I followed them to another large chamber. Here there was a bed quite similar to the one I had just left, except that it was covered with filaments of a sort of fungus growth resembling mushrooms. The ants nipped off some particles of this vegetable formation and carried them back to the chamber where the bed of leaf compost had just been prepared. Dropping the particles of fungus on the newly formed bed, they covered them over carefully with the leaf pellets.

The for the first time the truth dawned on me!

We were really Farmer Ants, or Mushroom Growers. All this gathering of leaf particles and the subsequent preparation of the beds had been designed solely for one purpose—to raise food for the colony in underground fungus gardens.

I verified this later when I ate some of the mushrooms and found them very pleasant to the taste.

Now that we had prepared our seed bed and had planted our crop, there would be nothing to do but wait for the harvest, thought I. But I soon found out

that there was plenty of work to do in the nest besides gardening.

Taking care of the brood was the biggest job of all. It seemed as if this important task occupied the time of thousands of ants almost constantly. While there were some ants who specialized in the nursing work and did little else, there were many times when all the rest of us helped them with their manifold duties.

I have seen a lot of human mothers who were constantly fussing with their children, but none of them showed anywhere near as much solicitude for their charges as the ants did for their baby sisters. In our nurseries there were four different kinds of infants, the eggs, the larvae, the pupae, and the imagal instars or immature antlets.

My sojourn in the Mushroom Growers' home soon corrected certain erroneous ideas I had previously had regarding ants' offspring. I recalled one mistake I had made when I was a boy. While watching a colony of ants move to a new nest, I noticed that some of them were carrying egg-shaped white objects which were quite large, nearly as big as the ants themselves. I immediately assumed that these objects were eggs, but my experience as an ant taught me that they were really cocoons enclosing the nymphs or pupae.

Ant eggs are small, almost microscopic in size. The ones I have

seen by daylight were pale yellow in color. They were surrounded by a sticky fluid which held them together in clusters like bunches of grapes. As soon as these eggs were laid, they were removed by the queen's maids of honor and were carefully deposited on the beds of growing mushrooms.

On the day I arrived I saw several of the eggs hatch out. The creatures which emerged from them were soft, legless, translucent grubs. An ant larva is shaped like a crook-necked squash or gourd, divided into clearly marked segments and terminating in a small but well defined head. I counted the ridges in one of these tiny grubs and found that there were exactly thirteen of them. The larvae were completely covered with fine hairs which kept them warm and prevented their bodies from coming in close contact with the ground or with other objects.

Apparently these grubs were equipped with organs for spinning silk. After they had developed to a certain point, they surrounded themselves with snow-white cocoons. Then they were buried in the earth by the nurses. Thus protected they went through the chrysalis or pupal stage of their development. When the right time arrived, the mature ants dug them up and by carefully biting holes in the co-

coons helped them get out of their prisons.

The little ones that crawled out of the cocoons were shaped like grown ants, but differed from them materially. A few had wings but most of them were wingless. They had soft bodies and for this reason had to stay inside the nest until their protective armors of chitin had become hard.

Our formicary was a large one and was divided into innumerable chambers and passage-ways. Most of the time the eggs were stored in the upper stories where they would get the benefit of the sun's warmth. The floors below them were reserved for the larvae. Still further down were the chambers in which the cocoons lay buried.

The eggs, the larvae and the nymphs all had to be cared for constantly. The nurses were forever licking them, cleansing them, turning them over and arranging them in the order of size. Like other infants, the larvae were always hungry. They were fed by the living nursing bottles, who chewed the mushroom growth, deposited the juices in their crops and then regurgitated the liquid for the benefit of the baby ants.

In the middle of the day the upper chambers, which were exposed to the powerful heat of the California sun, became so warm that the eggs were in danger of being baked. But the efficient

nurses were right on the job. The set to work diligently, picking up the clusters of eggs in their mandibles and carrying them to another large chamber at a lower level where the temperature was more salubrious. Late in the afternoon, however, the nest cooled off, and all the eggs had to be brought back again to their original resting place.

Toward evening of the first day I had the honor of being presented to the queen mother of our colony. The way this came about was extremely significant. I was crawling along one of the passageways inside the nest when I encountered an ant which I recognized instantly as the one which had first greeted me. She seemed to remember me, too, probably because of the unusual food I had given her. This time she wasted no time in examining me, but immediately assumed a position facing me and began to stroke my head with her antennae. Followed then the pleasant sensation, the regurgitation of the droplet of my crop and the sisterly kiss.

This time, my friend became very much excited. She would scamper away for a short distance and then stop, waving her antennae at me. Then she would come running back and would nudge me with her head. It was perfectly clear to me that she wanted me to accompany her into one of the tunnels leading away

from the main passageway, and I was stubborn enough to pretend I didn't know what she wanted me for.

I could almost hear her say in a coaxing manner, "Come along with me, Sister, please do." But I didn't budge. Her demeanor changed slightly. She didn't exactly seem exasperated, though I could plainly understand that she pitied me for my seeming stupidity.

"You certainly are a dumb one," was the message she transmitted to me, "but you've just got to come along with me, so I suppose I shall have to carry you."

Though she was much smaller than I, she didn't have the slightest trouble in doing this. With the utmost care and gentleness she seized me with her mandibles, lifted me off the ground and hurried through the tunnel at a brisk trot. Soon she entered a small chamber and deposited me on the floor. It took but a few good sniffs to tell me that I was now in the holy-of-holies—the royal chamber of the queen.

There she lay in regal splendor, surrounded by ten or twelve of her most trusted retainers. She was fully four times as large as any of the rest of us and the mature nurses reminded me of baby kittens as the climbed over their huge parent. Four of them were giving her a bath, licking her

thoroughly with their soft spongy tongues. Cleanliness was the first law of the throne room, just as it was everywhere else in Antdom.

Our mother had just laid a batch of eggs which were immediately removed by some of the nurses, who carried them off in the direction of the mushroom gardens.

Though I hesitated about coming close to her august majesty, my companion pushed and nudged me until I was face to face with the queen herself. In the most friendly manner she extended her mandibles and began to stroke me affectionately. I regurgitated an unusually large droplet of honey for her, and she kissed me as she swallowed it.

Apparently she found this unusual tid-bit very pleasant after her steady diet of mushroom juice, for she would not let me go, but continued to caress me until my crop was almost empty. It is impossible for me to describe what a source of pleasure this experience was to me. My greatest regret was that I would not be able to replenish the supply of honey in my social flagon so that I could bring more enjoyment to my queen.

Just as we ants kept cleansing our queen and her children with meticulous care, we also were everlastingly fastidious about our own personal cleanliness. Whenever we could spare a moment from our other duties,

we set to work scraping, brushing and licking our own bodies. In this work, we always assisted each other to clean the parts that were hard to reach. Though we had neither soap, water, brushes nor combs, we performed these tasks with marvelous efficiency. As a matter of fact, we carried all the necessary tools and materials in our own bodies. We were all equipped with stiff-bristled brushes in the form of spurs attached to our forelegs. Our tongues constituted the best sponges we could ask for. I have reason to believe that our saliva was not only a powerful cleansing reagent but was also oily and germicidal. In no other way can I account for our absolute immunity against the molds and bacteria which must have abounded in our subterranean caverns.

Altogether that first day I spent among my little insect friends was a very busy one and an ex-

tremely happy one. Perhaps my imperfect descriptions of my activities have given the impression that they were rather menial and humdrum in character. Nothing could be further from the truth. To be sure, I had done nothing but perform tasks that men regard as commonplace. In one day I had been a farmer, a nurse, a porter, a caterer and a bath attendant. But everything I did was like a big adventure. Never in my life as a human being have I gone through a day that was more fraught with interest, excitement and wholesome joy.

And though I had expected nothing but the most peaceful experiences in that city of honest farmers, I was to witness that very night the most horrible scenes of criminal violence, of dastardly villainy and of deadly peril to myself and my friends.

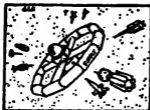
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